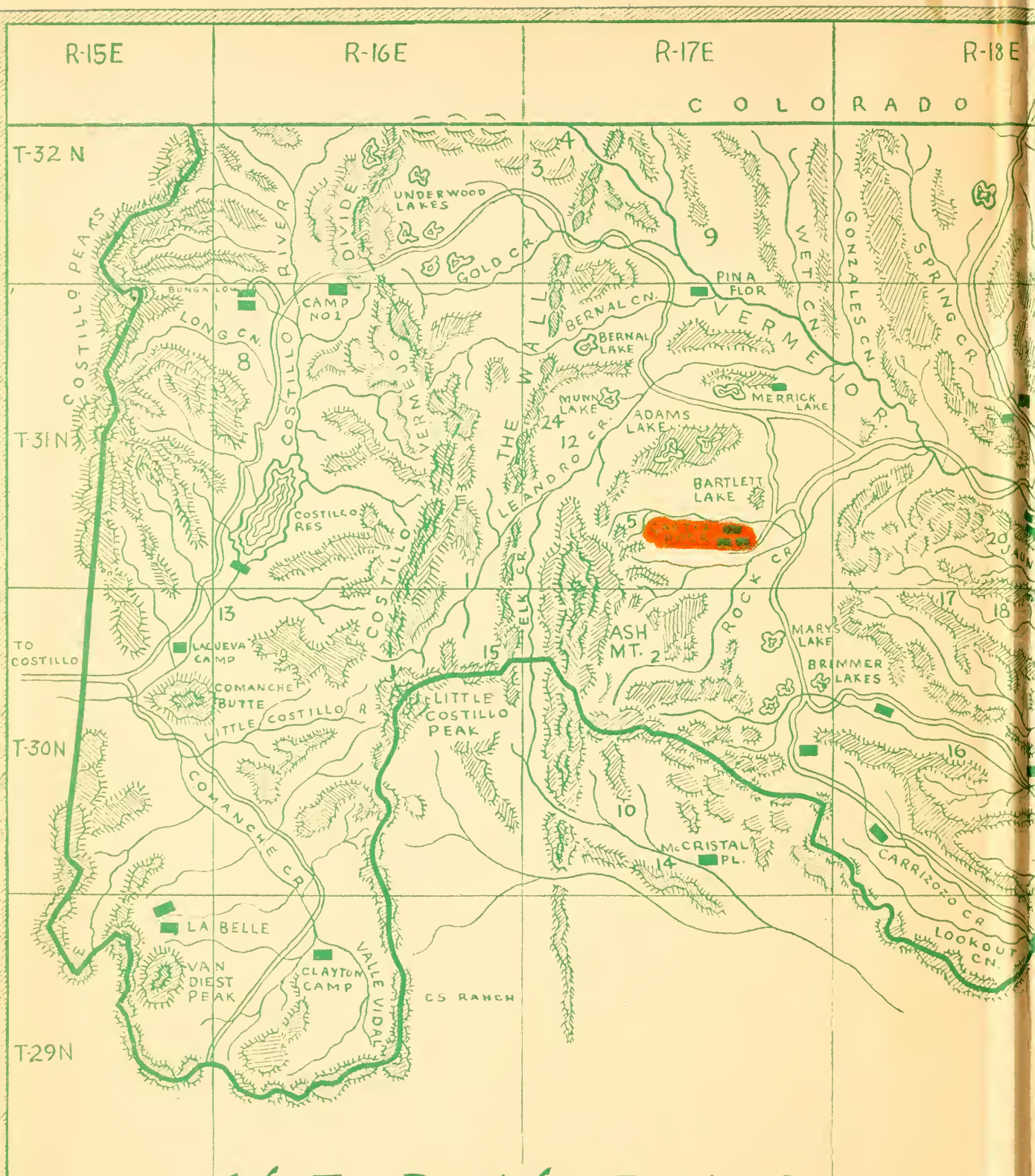
WHEN THE DOGS BARK 'TREED'

ELLIOTT S. BARKER



VERMEJO PARK

SCALE – ¼ INCH = 1 MILE

LEGEND

CANYONS – CREEKS

ROADS

COW CAMPS, HDQS.

LAKES

RIDGES – PEAKS

PREPARED BY THE AUTHOR – 1946

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WHEN THE DOGS BARK 'TREED'

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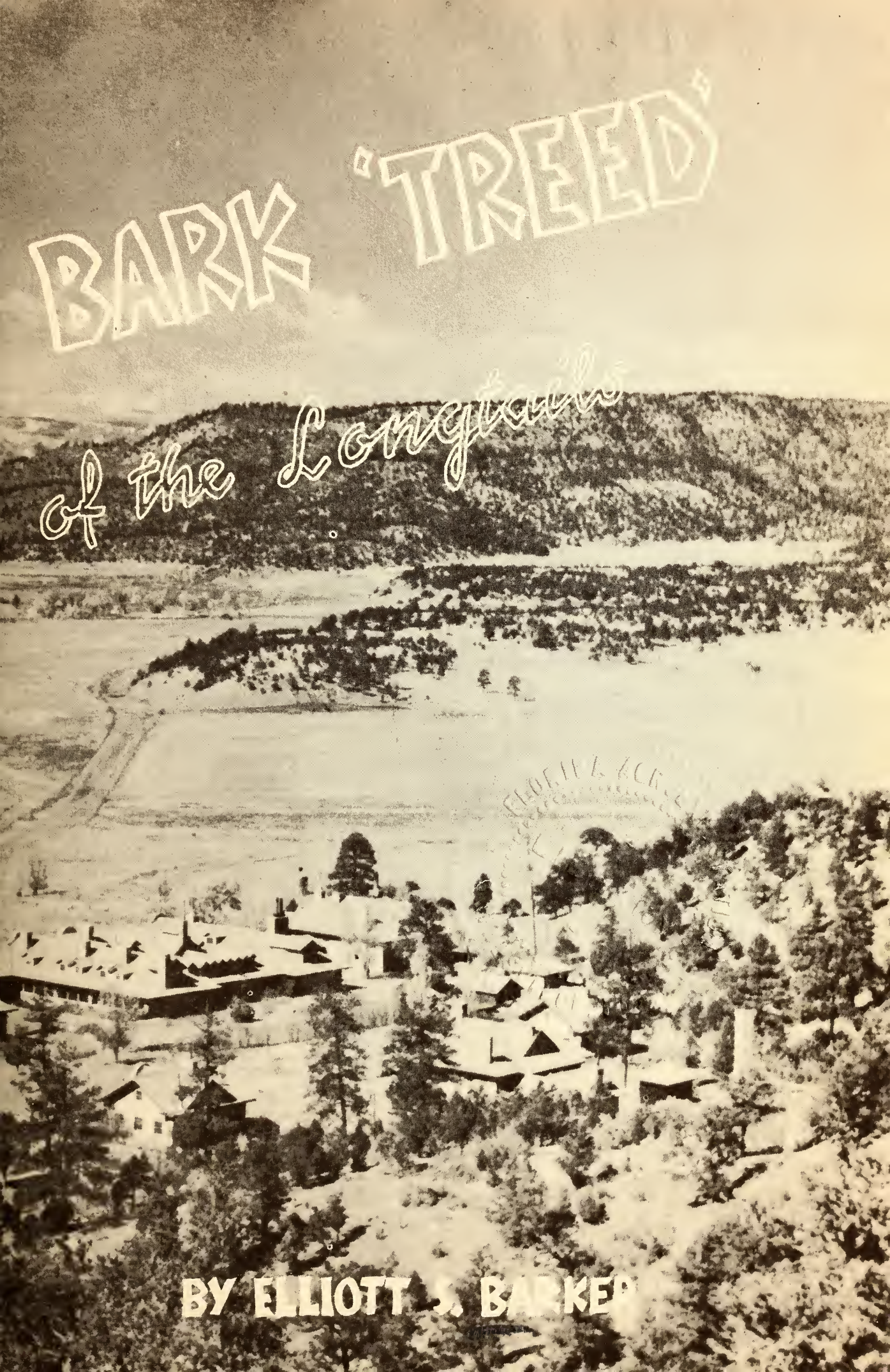
HEADQUARTERS,
Vermejo Park, New Mexico

Photo by Rex Peters

WHEN THE DOGS
A Year on the Trail
THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO PRESS
ALBUQUERQUE - - - 1946

BARK 'TREED' of the Longtails



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To My Son

ROY ELLIOTT BARKER

who has just returned home from the South Pacific after serving his country, as a corpsman attached to the Marines, in a war fought in the defense of the rights of a free people, not the least of which is the inalienable right of free Americans to hunt and fish

213620

Castle Rock Camp

The author ready for the hunt

Preface

IF THERE IS ANY GOOD REASON WHY I SHOULD WRITE THIS BOOK, IT IS THAT THERE IS NO ONE ELSE TO DO IT. It is a hunter's story, but more than that, an account of work with game and predators, principally mountain lions, while I was employed by the Vermejo Club from April 1, 1930, to March 31, 1931. Since most of this time, except for my horses and dogs, I rode alone, no one else knows what happened.

Having from time to time related some of my experiences to friends, I have been urged to make them available to others who might enjoy reading them. I have acceded with many misgivings. If, however, the reader gets only a very small fraction of the enjoyment from reading of these experiences that I have had in recalling them, I shall be satisfied.

Many big-game hunting stories have been written by sportsmen with considerable literary ability and more or less vivid imagination. I have neither. While I pride myself on being a sportsman, these pages are not written from the viewpoint of the sportsman who goes out on an occasional hunt with hired guides and a lot of cumbersome paraphernalia. Rather, the viewpoint is that of an experienced hunter who of necessity is working at a job, yet at the same time getting out of it as much sport as possible.

No attempt will be made to debunk anybody's pet theories. Instead I shall relate as accurately as possible the incidents as they happened and set down facts as I found them. In so doing I hope at least a small contribution of factual data useful

in game management and predator control will have been made.

It seems pertinent to tell here just how it came about that I was on this job. Having been reared in a game and predator country in the mountains of New Mexico, I had from boyhood specialized in hunting, particularly with dogs. In the early days I had hunted and trapped for the bounty and fur values of bears, mountain lions, bobcats, and coyotes.

Through the ten years I was employed by the United States Forest Service (Ranger to Forest Supervisor), my interest and activity in this field had continued. Then for eleven years, from 1919, when I left the Forest Service, to 1930, while I was again farming and ranching in the mountains, I had opportunity to do a great deal of hunting and trapping.

When the depression set in, in 1929, I determined to get out of the farming and ranch business and get a job rather than go broke. When I had sold my stock and leased my ranch, I accepted a job with the Vermejo Club to have charge of the game and predator work on its 360,000-acre estate in northern New Mexico. After remaining there just one year, I was appointed State Game Warden. This story is about the work I did during the year at Vermejo Park.

Whether my decision to quit farming and ranching for game work was a wise choice or not, I shall never know. I am greatly intrigued by the thought of what a great success I might have been at farming had I remained at it until the New Deal's policy of paying farmers for *not* raising crops was put into effect. But I didn't, and what I found in store for me in game work has been more than worth while. My work and play with game and predators from boyhood had prepared me for it.

Elliott S. Barker

Santa Fe, New Mexico

Acknowledgments

THE AUTHOR AND THE PUBLISHER GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGE THE PRIVILEGE OF REPRINTING THE CHAPTERS, "Leading a Dog's Life" and "My Narrowest Escape from Death," originally printed in *Field and Stream,* the latter having been printed under the title, "Dragged by a Horse"; also, the privilege of reprinting the chapter, "First Lion" originally printed by *Outdoor Life,* November, 1945, under the title, "I got my Lion at Fourteen." The author also gratefully acknowledges the valuable technical assistance rendered by Elsa and S. Omar Barker, and the encouragement and advice of many friends in the preparation of the manuscript.

Foreword

THE PAGES OF THIS THRILLING BOOK VIVIDLY REFLECT THE AUTHOR'S LOVE FOR WILDLIFE AND FOR WILD PLACES. It is a fitting climax to his years of rugged experience afoot and in the saddle, as rancher and hunter. It is a portrayal of a conservationist and administrator of wildlife resources who came up the hard way. It, incidentally, presents a vast store of information about game and predators and their environment which the author has gleaned from long years of firsthand contacts.

Only the pioneer who helped blaze the dangerous, difficult trails of exploration and conquest could fully appreciate the part played by horses and dogs in such adventures. Elliott Barker, as his book so clearly shows, appreciated his dogs and horses and gives them a full share of credit for his success in following and destroying the larger predaceous animals. One has only to follow the story as it swiftly unfolds to appreciate the fact that the author is a product of the saddle and of the mountains and forests of his beloved Sunshine State.

My acquaintance with the author dates back to 1916, when he was Deputy Supervisor of the Carson National Forest of northern New Mexico. Automobiles were then few in that section and traversable roads practically non-existent; hence we traveled in a light rig behind Barker's team of spirited matched horses, from Taos into the Tres Piedras division of the Forest. Elliott Barker's ability to meet and master difficulties, or to go on in spite of them, was displayed many times in

those years when we worked together, as it has been shown in all the years since. I remember particularly that when we would reach the end of vehicle travel, he would proceed bareback, insisting that I use the one saddle at our disposal.

The author is a conservative and enthusiastic big game hunter; but, as is so entertainingly portrayed in this story, one of his favorite sports afield is the pursuit of the larger predatory animals who do not respect seasons or bag limits in their destruction of game. His passion for a square deal for game is typically reflected in the case of the illegal killing of a doe antelope and the pleading of misidentity by the erring hunter, to whom Barker responded: "I have always had to pay for my mistakes and you must, in this case, pay for yours."

No other was better qualified to pen the pages of this book, rich in romance and factual material, than Elliott Barker, and no stage more fitting for the enactment of the drama than the Vermejo Park property, a part of the famous old Maxwell Land Grant, still in almost primitive state, in northern New Mexico.

J. Stokley Ligon

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Chapter 1

First Lion

AT FOURTEEN I HAD NEVER KILLED A MOUNTAIN LION. WITH ONE BEAR AND two deer already to my credit, it seemed to me, to avoid disgrace, it was time to remedy the situation on long-tails. Now after kicking Old Slocum along through the deep snow all day, with two untrained dogs of uncertain ancestry at heel, I was still hoping for a lion track.

My father had seen lion tracks recently over on Beaver Creek, and I meant to make the best of my short Christmas vacation from school in Las Vegas to hustle around in the woods and get me one. But now I had ridden all day without even crossing a track. Pa's old .45-70 Winchester lay heavy across my saddle as the long shadows of late afternoon turned me in discouragement homeward.

Then, just at sundown, as I was crossing through the dark timber of Sulphur Springs Pass, suddenly there were fresh lion tracks, right in the trail and headed my way; not just one,

but four—two big and two small! I got off and examined them carefully to be sure it was lions, for I hadn't seen many lion tracks before.

I have never since experienced quite the same thrill of impending adventure that the sight of those lion tracks gave me. Four, when I had hoped for only one! Tingling with a boy's eagerness, I realized it was up to me and my dogs to make good.

What would folks say if we didn't make good? No! I determined that must not happen.

The imprint of the lions' bodies was left in the deep snow where they had wallowed through it single file. Now and then, under spreading fir trees where the snow was not so deep, they separated. Thus I checked and rechecked the number, as tensely we followed them down the trail. The dogs were anxious to run on the tracks, but I kept them back because I didn't want to tackle four lions alone between sundown and dark.

Down the trail they went right into the Sulphur Springs basin—a place where lions often killed deer. At the Springs the tracks turned down to the right into the heavy timber, while the trail led around through the aspen benches to the left. Darkness was now rapidly overtaking us and it was still a mile and a half home. I took the trail and abandoned the tracks for the night. The dogs, bolder than I, wanted to follow the tracks, but I called them off.

Pa didn't believe I had found four lions when I told him my story that night.

"If there were four lions sure enough, you can't go after them alone."

"Why not?" I asked, with youthful confidence.

"Because your britches are too little," said Pa; and that settled it.

When the Dogs Bark 'TREED'

My father had killed several lions and liked to hunt them, but he couldn't go with me. So I got a neighbor boy, Tom Blake, who was several years older than I but not much of a hunter, to go with me next morning to take up the tracks.

Tom and I rode back up there, cutting into the timber below where I had left the tracks. The snow lay so deep on this steep north slope that even our stout mountain horses found it difficult going. The dogs got along pretty well while they stayed in the trail behind the horses, but could make little headway when they tried the unbroken snow.

There were then, as there always have been, some deer that winter in this timber and on the adjacent aspen slopes, in spite of the deep snow. The dogs, Shep and Towser, kept smelling of the deer tracks that we crossed, for they were hunting the lion tracks we had been on yesterday.

Shep was a shaggy, black young dog with a white breast, a white strip in the face, and brown eyebrows. He was alert and active—perhaps part shepherd.

Towser was black also, but older and larger, with short hair and the big, bulldog-type head typical of a tenacious fighter.

These two dogs had previously treed two or three lions and several bobcats which had been run onto accidentally, but in no sense could they be considered trained hunting dogs.

"Look, Tom," I cried excitedly, pointing to a trail through the snow above us.

Tom said, "That them? Looks more like where a log has been dragged."

"It's them, sure as shootin'," I said. "Sick 'em, Towser! Get 'em, Shep!" The dogs took out on the trail as fast as they could go, which wasn't any faster than a man can walk on open ground. We knew the long-tails couldn't do any better, especially as they would have to break trail.

We kicked our horses along through the belly-deep snow around the slope to a little draw in the bottom of which we found the remains of a big buck deer that had been killed the night before and all but cleaned up by the four lions. The whole place was tramped down and the dogs were milling around trying to find where the tracks led out. Up the hill was a print in the snow such as Tom had said looked like where a log had been dragged. I rode up to it.

"Here, Towser! Here, Shep!" I called. "Get 'em, boys!" The dogs were off again, all excited and pepped up by the hot, fresh tracks. We urged our horses right after them. Soon we hit some rough country, too steep and loggy, combined with the deep snow, for the horses to get through. We got off, tied them to some little trees, and followed on afoot.

The snow was up to our thighs and the going was really tough. The trail the lions and dogs made, where they wallowed through in single file, helped some, but it wound around through the thickets of snow-covered young fir so much that it was easier to cut corners through unbroken snow than to follow it. The dogs were trailing silently except for an occasional bark that Shep gave when Towser would get ahead of him.

Then, without warning, they were making the woods ring with their steady, eager barking, not a quarter of a mile up the hill.

"They've got 'em treed!" I yelled.

"Already?" Tom asked unbelievingly. From the first he hadn't had much faith in the adventure.

"Sick 'em, Towser! Get 'em, Shep! Stay with 'em, boys!" I hollered encouragement at the top of my voice.

Then lunging ahead, floundering through the deep snow, we made our way toward the dogs. I think that was the longest quarter-mile I ever traveled. The .45-70 got heavier

and heavier, the hill steeper, and the snow deeper. Putting forth every effort, we struggled along until we were completely out of breath and it seemed our lungs would burst.

But we hurried on at a turtle's pace. Why we thought we had to hurry so, I don't know. The dogs would keep the lions up and not let them get away.

At last we came in sight of the dogs about fifty yards up the hill, frantically barking up a big fir tree.

Tom said, "You take the first one."

Before I could get breath to answer, I got a glimpse of the tawny, white-bellied body of a lion lying awkwardly across some limbs, with its long tail hanging down through the branches. I didn't wait to get my breath or steady my trembling nerves, or even to rest the heavy gun across a limb or against a tree. I just pulled up the heavy, long-barreled rifle, took a snap bead on the lion's body, and pulled the trigger. I had not held the big gun tight against my shoulder and it kicked me off balance, and I sat down in the snow. When I got up, the lion was on the ground in a fight with the dogs. We couldn't see just what was happening, but it looked and sounded like plenty.

Pa had told me to be sure and make a dead shot so as not to get a dog hurt by a wounded lion. In my excitement and anxiety, I had forgotten to take that precaution, had made a bad shot, and the dogs were right in the middle of a snarling, dangerous fight.

We started toward the scene as fast as we could, and then—

"Look out! Here he comes!" Tom yelled, as the wounded lion broke loose from the dogs and bounded through the snow right toward us. We dared not shoot, for the dogs were right in line, and we couldn't run. We froze in our tracks, ready to shoot at point-blank range if necessary.

When about thirty feet from us, the lion started to climb

another tree; but the dogs caught it, Shep by the tail and Towser by the seat of the pants. In the instant before they could pull the lion back down, or it could break loose and go on up the tree, I shot again. This time the heavy lead slug passed through the lion's heart instead of the guts, where the first one had gone.

That was my first lion, and was I a proud kid!—proud and thrilled to the ends of my toes, and trembling like a leaf.

"Good boy!" Tom said, and we solemnly shook hands—with already shaking hands.

This was a big, old female. That left Papa lion and two half-grown cubs. We looked for them right there in the trees, but failed to find them. Then we missed the dogs. We called them, but they did not come. We scouted around and found they had gone on up the hill on a trail that looked like a log-drag.

We had regained our wind, and though wet to our waists from wallowing through the snow, we went on after the dogs. At last, thoroughly out of breath again, we reached the Sulphur Springs Pass. The lion and dog tracks led through it and on over onto the south exposure toward Beaver Creek. There the snow was not so deep, but was wet and heavy.

We looked the tracks over carefully and were pretty sure only one lion had gone this way. The tracks showed it was a big one and on the run, and the dogs hot after it.

"Where are the young ones?" I asked.

"To hell with the young ones!" Tom snapped impatiently. "This big one will do me!"

We ran down the hill on the tracks a way, then stopped to listen. We could barely hear the dogs barking, and it sounded as if they were away down in the bottom of Beaver Creek. We ran on again. Suddenly we came out on top of a thirty-foot cliff. There at the base of it and directly below

A band of elk at sunup head back to the timber

Band of elk crossing field at Castle Rock. Ash Mountain in the background

us were the dogs barking up a big pine tree. Being under the cliff had made them sound so far away.

Surprised to find them so soon, we stood there for an instant looking down at the dogs. Then, as we grasped the situation, we looked up the tree.

"Gosh-amighty! Look there!" I exclaimed.

"Be still," Tom whispered, as if afraid to speak out loud. Then he raised his rifle and took deliberate and careful aim at the dull-gray head of the lion, as he looked at us calmly from his perch not fifteen feet away. At the crack of the rifle, the big yellowish-red, long-tailed beast fell end over end to the ground below, where the dogs pounced upon it and wooled it off down the hill. We figured that the lion had jumped from the top of the cliff to the tree, which was only twelve or fifteen feet away. The dogs had gone below before they discovered where he was.

We were elated and amazed at the sudden end of the chase, and a bit taken aback to think we had come so close to the lion before seeing him.

When we went around the cliff and down to the lion, the dogs had finished their fun and were lying near by, panting, their red tongues dripping. They looked thoroughly satisfied. They, too, had found lion hunting fun and were enjoying it as much as we.

"Mine's the biggest!" Tom bragged.

"I bet it aint!" But I knew it was. Really, it didn't matter which was the bigger. We had each got a lion—that was what we had set out to do, and we were both feeling pretty high just then.

We built a fire to dry our pants, for we were soaking wet to the waist. Then we skinned the lion with our pocket knives right there by the fire, hurrying the process by cutting the head and feet off, and leaving them in the skin, to be skinned

out later. Then we took turns carrying the fresh, heavy skin, as we made our way laboriously back up the hill to look for the two young lions we had missed.

Only one of two things could have happened: either the cubs had turned off to one side, or had taken to trees along the route. From the Pass down to the first lion, we made sure that no lions had turned off on either side. It was not so easy to be sure they were not in trees along the route, for in the dense fir and spruce timber, a lion could easily avoid detection.

We soon reached my lion, which had been left lying where it fell, but found neither of the young ones. We decided to drag my lion down to the horses and pack her in whole. Kid-like, I just had to take her in whole to show off what I had done. We started on down to where we had left our horses, following our back track, which made it easier going through the deep snow. Suddenly, I saw the track of a small lion going down the track we had made coming up.

"Towser! Shep! Come here!" I called. "Sick 'em!" And they were off on the track, bounding through the snow. The chase was destined to be a short one. A hundred yards down the hill they barked "treed" for the third time that day.

Burdened with one lion and the skin of another, and with the lion-hunting edge taken off, we did not hurry. Anyway, we had already begun to feel that we were experienced lion hunters and from now out would take them in our stride. At the tree, I shot the half-grown cub out, killing it with a single shot and without being kicked over into the snow. I was as proud of this one as I had been of the first one, and that was something. Very near this same spot twenty-four years later, I again had cause to be proud when my son, at thirteen, killed his first lion.

We were now near the horses and dragged the two lions

on down. Then we looked and looked, back and forth along the trail we had made to the Sulphur Springs Pass, but could not find the fourth lion. He was evidently hidden somewhere in the branches of a tree. A week later, a neighbor went back and found it near the same buck the four had killed.

I was not only a mighty proud kid, packing in two lions killed in one day, but I had found lion hunting is great sport. It was my privilege in the years that followed to trail down, with hounds, Airedales, and other dogs, many another long-tail. But almost always, whether on through my boyhood or while employed by the United States Forest Service or during my ranching days, these hunts were primarily for sport. But in 1930 there came a time when it was up to me to kill mountain lions—or else. That was when I was forced out of the ranching business by the crash of 1929 and accepted employment as predatory animal hunter and game manager for the vast 360,000-acre game park operated by the Vermejo Club in northern New Mexico.

My position there included many other duties such as supervision of a farm, guiding hunters, preventing poaching, and occasional assistance in cattle work; but the first big job that confronted me was to get rid of the numerous mountain lions that had been preying heavily on game and occasionally on livestock. Holding the position depended upon my ability to get out and get those long-tailed cats.

With nearly a hundred lions already to my credit and with Queenie, Pup, and Puse, three of the best hunting Airedales that ever talked to a lion up a tree, to help me, I was as full of confidence as the sky of a New Mexico night is full of stars.

Yet in those rough ridges and rim-rocked canyons, before my faithful dogs and I at last hit our stride, that confidence—though never lost—certainly took some mighty severe jolts.

Chapter 2

Getting Started

JOE AND I ATE BREAKFAST BY LAMPLIGHT. WITH A COUPLE OF biscuit-and-egg sandwiches in our pockets for noon lunch, we saddled our horses and buckled on our chaps and spurs. In the gray dawn of a moonless April morning, we rode west from Castle Rock toward Leandro Creek. Pup and Puse frolicked around the horses with delight in evident anticipation of a lion or cat chase before the day's end. We had got what is considered in ranch country as a good start for the day's work ahead.

This being my first day at Vermejo Park, Manager Tom Talle had suggested that I ride with one of his cowboys who could sort of show me the country on the way to his daily cow work.

As we rode away in the darkness, Joe told me this story:

"A farmer hired a tramp to help him harvest. While eating breakfast by lamplight, the newly hired hand asked, 'What we going to do today?'

" 'Bind oats,' replied the farmer.

" 'What kind of oats?' asked the tramp.

" 'Just ordinary oats. Why?'

" 'Well,' said the tramp, 'I thought maybe they was wild oats and you had to get up early to slip up on them while it's still dark.' "

I thought how apropos the story was of the work I was to do. Long experience had taught me that where wildlife is concerned, whether it be game or predators, there is a lot that happens at, or just after, daylight that never occurs in midday. If one wants to be in on these happenings, or at the scene at a time when he can capitalize on them, he almost literally must get up early enough to "slip up on them."

During the year that followed, particularly throughout the summer and fall, three or four o'clock in the morning found me in the saddle more often than not. Many individuals, particularly sportsmen and tourists, enjoy getting up before sunrise occasionally, just for the thrill of it; but being hard at work by "sunup" is a regular practice born of necessity for the ranchman, cowboy, and professional hunter.

Just at sunup we topped a rise overlooking a side draw on the grassy slopes south of Leandro Creek. Suddenly a large cow elk, with typical black neck and brown-gray body, trotted up the opposite slope and stopped to look us over. As we watched, another and another elk followed until there were thirty-seven head in all, grouped together as if for safety, watching us with as much interest as we were watching them. I had never before seen that many elk in one bunch.

There were no young calves, for they do not come until May and, while there were several bulls which could readily

be distinguished by their greater size and lighter gray bodies, only one had antlers. This was a rather small yearling with spikes perhaps fourteen or fifteen inches long. The other bulls had already shed their big antlers, as they do each year in late February and March, and the new ones were not yet noticeably started.

After posing beautifully in the pink rays of the early morning sun for two or three minutes, the old cow led off over the ridge out of sight. The others followed quickly in a closely grouped, single-file formation—that is, all but one. A large gray, black-necked bull, with much loss of dignity because of the massive set of antlers that he had but recently lost, and because the new and perhaps larger ones that he would proudly display four months hence had not showed up yet, stood for a minute or two longer. Then he turned his yellowish-white rump toward us and leisurely trotted after the bunch.

"You'll see a lot of them," said Joe.

"How many?" I asked.

"I don't know," Joe said; "sometimes it seems there are lots, and again it don't seem like there are so many. The Boss says 1,500. Me, I ain't counted them lately."

"Fifteen hundred is a lot of elk," I said.

"It sure seems like lots when I have to fix up a fence that a big bunch runs over," said Joe complainingly.

And so was presented one of the questions I realized I was sooner or later to be asked to answer. How many elk are there on Vermejo Park's 360,000 acres of mountains, hills, and valleys? A year later I prefaced my estimate by saying, as Joe had said, "Sometimes it seems there are lots and sometimes it seems like there aren't so many."

As we rode on I felt that the sight we had just observed was big payment for being out on the job by sunup. At Leandro Creek, a series of beaver dams forced us to detour a

hundred yards upstream from the regular crossing, and as we skirted the edge of one of the large ponds, a huge, glossy, brown, flat-tailed beaver plunged awkwardly down the slope from where he had been cutting down an aspen tree, and dived into the water with a great splash.

At the "Wall" we separated, for I wanted to cut for lion sign and Joe had a cattle job over on Gold Creek. The Wall is a prominent natural stone dyke crossing this property from north to south. In many places the Wall consists literally of a natural rock wall from ten to fifty feet high and ten to thirty feet thick. At other places, it is just a high, rock-crowned, precipitous ridge. At still other places, it is a jumbled mass of boulders stacked up along the ridge tops. Ash Mountain is the largest and most impenetrable of such areas. Here the whole mountain top is covered with irregular-shaped, slate-gray boulders from the size of a tub to the size of a truck, piled together in such form that there is no soil or vegetation at all. Instead, great holes and crevices are formed between and beneath the surface rocks. Great rock slides extend down in long, narrow strips into the canyons heading against the mountain. Such areas cannot be crossed on horseback and are difficult afoot.

Along the Wall in all its forms, I later found, was a favorite passway for lions, especially in the summer months. Surmising that this would probably be true, I rode north from Leandro Creek up along the east side of the Wall and there soon found plenty of old lion sign. None was fresh enough for the dogs to follow, but from the number of "scrapes," I concluded there must be at least two male lions ranging through here. I found one old track perfectly molded in dried mud, which appeared to be that of a medium-sized female. From various indications, I concluded that perhaps the female was in season and the two males were competing for her favor.

If you have never hunted mountain lions and thus become familiar with terms used by lion hunters, it may be appropriate to explain briefly their meaning. The principal items included in the broad expression "lion sign" are the scrape, the track, the kill of prey, dung, the mound, and occasionally the "laying-up" bed.

The scrape, except in very rare instances, is made by the male lion only, but it is the sign most readily observed by the hunter and most easily scented by the dogs. It consists of tree needles, leaves, rotten wood, or dirt and rubble, according to the material available, scraped up into a small mound. It is usually eight to ten inches wide at the base and from three to six inches high and is made with heavy, but short, backward, alternating strokes of the hind feet, leaving a dual dig on one side of the heap. Thus from the scrape one can tell which way the lion was traveling. Urine is deposited upon the pile apparently as a scent station, and many scrapes will often be found near a kill or where courtship of a female has taken place.

The track, visible only in snow, mud, dust, or on soft ground, is almost round and from two and a half to four and a half inches across and may be positively identified by certain unmistakable characteristics. Its roundness distinguishes it from a dog, wolf, or coyote track, and unlike the claws of those animals, the lion's retractile claws leave no imprint. The forest carpet of needles, leaves, and grass, while holding the scent well, is very effective in obscuring the track of the lion; but the imprint of the heel, when it may be seen at all, cannot be confused with any other track. The heel is divided into three definite lobes like that of the house cat and bobcat, but is too large to be confused with them. While the lion has five very effective claws on the front feet, the dew claw, which is the largest, is high up on the inside of the foot; hence, only

the imprint of four toes is seen in the track. A bear leaves the print of five toes of each foot on the ground.

Like the track and scrape, the kill is also distinctive. The carcass of the animal which has fallen prey to a lion will almost always be found under fairly dense brush cover. If the kill is made in the open, the carcass will usually be dragged to the best nearby shaded covert available. There, the belly is ripped open and the entrails pulled out; thus the meat keeps better.

After each meal, the remainder of the carcass will be covered with such material as is available, usually tree needles, leaves, or grass being scraped up over it from all sides, often making quite a mound. The carcass of a deer, the lion's principal food, will not be torn to pieces and scattered about as is done by coyotes when they kill a deer.

I have seen grown horses and mules killed by a lion out in open areas and left there because they were too heavy to be dragged to cover, yet an effort will have been made to cover them with the scanty materials available by scraping grass, rubble, and dirt up against the sides of the carcass. Hence, even if a kill is quite old, whether it be a deer, a horse or colt, or a porcupine, the careful observer can determine whether or not it is a lion's kill.

The experienced hunter can also readily distinguish the lion's dung by the size and form from that of any other animal. If the lion is feeding on a freshly made kill, it will have very little hair or bone fragments in it and, while the dung is fresh, it will be quite black in color. After several meals have been made on the carcass of a deer, considerable quantities of hair will be found in the dung and often pieces of rib and other bones. If a porcupine or other small animal has been killed, pieces of the feet, including the claws and many small bones, will be found. While the dung produced by a meat diet is

very dark in color while fresh, it soon bleaches out white as it ages and dries out. It will be seen that a knowledge of scatology is very valuable, if not altogether attractive in its detailed application, in reading the story which lions, as well as other wild creatures, leave along their trails.

The mound is not often seen, and by some, perhaps, is not identified with a lion, and its significance not fully understood. The mounds, as I have seen them, consist of a pile of tree needles or leaves scraped up from all four sides to a height of several inches and from two to four feet across, often with lion dung in the heap; but never have I found bones or anything to indicate any sort of kill had been covered. Mounds apparently are made by the female lion while raising a litter of kittens. A mound is likely to be located in the general vicinity of a kill, and it may have something to do with the "laying-up" bed for kittens when left by the mother, as is her habit, while hunting for game to make a new kill for her ravenous offspring. At any rate, I never have failed to find definite sign that kittens had been in the vicinity of one of these mounds, and I have never found any regular male scrapes in the vicinity of one.

The "laying-up" bed of the lion, not too often found, is likely to be around a rocky ledge or cliff, but definitely not in a deep cave. Many times it will be in covert under a large tree near where a kill has been made, but the lion instinctively likes the rocky places—cliffs and rim rocks. He prowls through such areas at night and he likes to "lay up" and sun himself during the day in a rocky place.

But to get back to our story. We circled the area where we had found so much old sign, cutting for fresh track, but none could be found. By "we," as I shall use the pronoun many times in this narrative, I refer to my dogs, my horse, and me. Except for my dogs and my horse, I was alone dur-

ing most of the many thrilling experiences with predators and game which I am about to relate.

Finding no fresh sign, I concluded the long-tails had temporarily left the vicinity. I then rode on up Leandro Creek to the top of the divide between the Vermejo watershed, which drains to the east, and the Costilla watershed, which drains to the west. Here, while eating my sandwiches and resting my horse, I got a good bird's-eye view of the vast country I was to work in during the next twelve months. From the watershed divide at an elevation of about 10,000 feet, the country to the east breaks off abruptly down to the Wall, which forms a kind of barrier between the high and lower country. The Wall itself is high in places, but is broken by great gaps through which the crystal-clear streams heading against the high country back of it flow eastward to form the Vermejo River and Ponil Creek.

Below the Wall many timber- and brush-covered ridges interspersed with valleys and cliff-rimmed mesas stretch out to the east for fifty miles or more, eventually losing themselves in the haze and smoke from the coal mines around Raton and Trinidad. That is the principal winter range for the white-faced cattle, elk, and turkey, while the bulk of the deer range there the year round.

West of the watershed divide, I could see the Costilla Creek heading against snowcapped peaks just across the line in Colorado and, fed by its many tributaries, winding its way southward through a broad, grassy valley to Costilla Lake, a large, man-made water reservoir renowned for its fine trout fishing. To the southwest I could see the Valle Vidal and La Belle Valley, the drainage of which flows northward into Comanche Creek and thence into Costilla River below the reservoir.

West of the Costilla River the snowcapped Costilla Peaks towered to an elevation of 13,000 feet, and the Latir Peaks

beyond the Comanche Creek drainage went up to a similar elevation. Here in these broad valleys and in the myriad of aspen- and spruce-covered ridges and side canyons which flank them on all sides is the principal summer range for the elk herds, as well as for a large portion of the cattle. Turkeys likewise come to the high country to nest and raise their young where there is an abundance of green, succulent buds and shoots, and grasshoppers for food.

Away across the Costilla Valley with my field glasses I could see, nestling against the aspen-covered hills, the fine bungalow used as a fishing lodge by Harry Chandler of Los Angeles, principal owner of Vermejo Park.

As I sat there studying the country, I realized what a truly big job it would be to rid it of predators, such as lions, coyotes, and bobcats, to an extent where game would attain its maximum annual yield. Another big job would be to work out a practical management plan for game that would coördinate and harmonize game, particularly elk, with the livestock industry. It would take a year to get fully acquainted with the country and game habits in their use of it, and to rid the area of lions, which were, according to information provided by the manager, rapidly depleting the deer.

A pair of ravens circled overhead as if resenting this intrusion into their solitary habitat. A less timorous, slate-colored Canadian jay came up close to pick up and fly into a tree with a piece of biscuit I had thrown away. A gray-backed, whistling marmot huddled close to the top of a rock over his den, now and then giving that piercing, danger-signal whistle characteristic of his kind. Delicately striped chipmunks scurried along the tops of old, dry logs, busy in search of food and in courting maneuvers.

Presently the shrill yap, yap, yapping of a coyote down the slope startled me and brought the dogs instantly to action from

where, stretched flat in the warm sunshine, they had been drowsing. I got up and caught my horse where he had been nibbling a few tufts of grass, and we started back toward Castle Rock.

We took a different route back, and on the ridges only three miles back of Castle Rock I found more lion sign. At first I saw only a couple of scrapes. The dogs could identify lion scent, but it was a week old and there was no chance of following a track. We "messed around" quite a bit anyway, and soon Pup located an old lion kill. It was a large buck with a fine set of antlers, and from the fact that it had been killed before the antlers were shed, as well as from the appearance of the carcass, I concluded it had been made six weeks earlier.

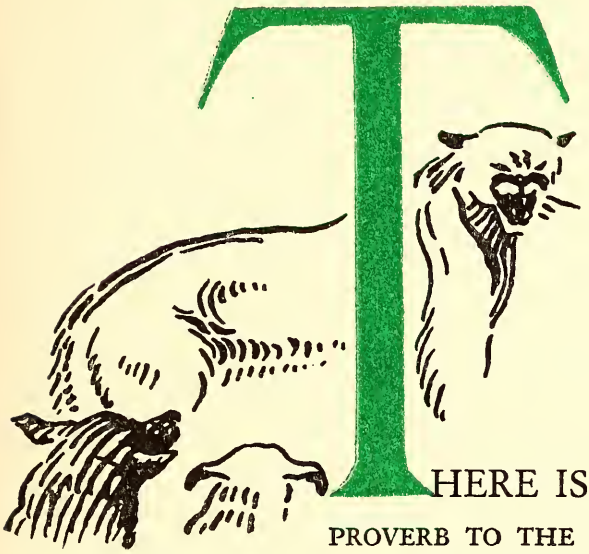
Prowling around we found plenty of old scrapes, lots of dung, and another kill—a doe—somewhat fresher than the other and less than a mile from it. I located pretty definitely a well-used lion passway through this piece of country, which lies between Ash Mountain and Castle Rock. This had every appearance of being a place where one could ride out every morning at daylight and be reasonably sure of picking up a hot trail within a week. I decided to follow that plan.

Pup and Puse could get enough lion scent to interest them thoroughly, and they worked energetically, testing every likely place, trying to find fresher sign. They knew very well by my interest that I wanted a lion, and they, too, were anxious for a chase.

These dogs were well-trained Airedales, excellent for quick catches on fresh tracks; but on a job of this kind, I had realized I would certainly need a hound for cold trailing and to better enable me to follow; so I had arranged to get one very soon. But with only the old sign I had found today, there had been no chance for any kind of dog.

A bit disappointed but not discouraged, at dusk we decided to call it a day, and went on in to Castle Rock. Joe had beat me in and had supper ready. His sourdough biscuits, French-fried potatoes, beefsteak and gravy, and coffee with more hot biscuits and syrup for dessert, were worthy of appetites sharpened by sixteen hours in the saddle. We paid double tribute and very promptly thereafter, to use the local vernacular, hit the hay.

Chapter 3



Hard Luck

THERE IS AN ANCIENT CHINESE PROVERB TO THE EFFECT THAT ANY JOB IS EASY if it is done the right way. But where lion hunting is concerned, the element of luck, good or bad, is always lurking around.

Thirty-odd years ago, my father-in-law gave me a four-year-old, unbroke, buckskin horse. High-spirited, and with good action, he was a fine prospect for a saddle horse. I started to break him myself, taught him to lead, and gentled him down some. Then one fine morning when there was quite a crowd present, I decided to ride him. I got into the saddle only to find out he knew more about bucking than any bronco I had ever ridden. I brushed the dust off me, caught him, and got on again. I grabbed for the saddle horn at the first jump but closed my hand on a bunch of grass instead, much to the amusement of the crowd.

Undaunted, I got on the third time, and stayed at least three jumps longer than before, but hit the ground all the

harder when I did go. That time, although I landed on my head, I got up with a badly sprained ankle; so I gave a neighbor bronco-buster ten dollars to ride the horse for me.

And so, while it was a painful and humiliating experience, I learned that the right and easy way for me to break a bad horse was to hire someone to do it who could.

But at Vermejo Park in the spring of 1930, I was assigned a job to do, and it was up to me alone to get it done. My instructions were to find out what was happening to the deer on this property and eliminate the cause of depletion. My first day's ride confirmed reports that lions were plentiful and taking far too heavy a toll.

On my second day I rode west to the lion passway I had located the day before, but no fresh sign was found. In the afternoon I rode east from Castle Rock through the heads of Pooler, Gachupin, and Juan Baca Canyons, where I found a mound which indicated there was a female lion with kittens ranging in this vicinity.

The mound was in the pine timber on a little bench land from which a cattle trail led down into the canyon. In this trail, which was now dry, there were the plain tracks of the long-tailed Old Lady and her young ones made while the trail was wet, but holding their form molded in the dried clay soil. I got off to examine them carefully and discovered that the Old Lady had a badly scarred heel. The track of the left hind foot did not show the normal three lobes; the one on the outside was missing. The track was lopsided, showing only the imprint of two thirds of the heel. It would be easy to identify the track of this lion wherever it might be seen.

"Well," I remarked to my dogs, "we've got a date with Old Lady Scar-Heel."

In two days I had seen the sign of more lions than I had ever seen in a two-day ride in my life: at least two males, prob-

ably three, and two females, one of which had kittens big enough to follow her.

The third day we were tickled pink when, on the ridges back of Castle Rock, we struck the fresh track of a big male lion. He was headed southwest and had passed early in the night.

"Pup! Puse! Go get him!" I said, as the dogs took off on the track. We followed the meandering tracks around cliffs and rocky slopes at a good pace until we had crossed a couple of canyons. Then as the sun got up, it dried out the heavy dew and the scent got fainter, slowing up the dogs quite a bit. But Long-Tail was going south, paralleling the Wall and headed toward good country. I felt very sure we would get the big fellow in another hour or two. A lion on my third day —that wouldn't be so bad.

Then unexpectedly the track turned up a ridge through dense aspen thickets, straight toward Ash Mountain. In these thickets it was hard to keep in hearing even of Queenie, who I knew was not keeping up with Pup and Puse. The country was new to me and I did not realize just what Ash Mountain was until, clambering over rocks and through dense thickets, we came out to face a whole mountain top of stacked-up boulders.

Mr. Lion had evidently decided to spend the day somewhere in that mass of rocks. The dogs, with dripping tongues and much nervous wiggling of stubby tails, were excitedly working but had only got fifty yards into the rock mass when I arrived. I went on afoot, climbing over boulders and jumping from one rock to another. The dogs would get the scent on one rock and then jump to another to try to pick it up again. It was as likely to be down in a crevice under the rock as on it. The lion was following an erratic zigzag course, over, under, and around boulders, and the dogs could make little progress.

As the sun got higher, the scent became fainter; and by eleven o'clock we had not progressed a half mile into that sea of jumbled-up boulders. Both Pup and Puse had bloody feet from clambering over the jagged rocks, and I decided further effort was of no use.

We did hate to give up that track, which at sunup had seemed like a perfect set-up for a sure, quick catch. I put it down as just a piece of hard luck which would not happen again.

But it did happen again. About a week later we hit another fresh male lion track on the passway; and, almost exactly as had happened the first time, he gave us the slip in the stacked rocks of Ash Mountain. We returned to camp that day rather down on our luck, and the group of cowboys now camped at Castle Rock didn't help matters any by their good-natured kidding.

One morning several days later, it was threatening rain, but I went out anyway, still hoping for a fresh track and a quick catch. Sure enough, we hit the trail of a great big, old male lion headed north. That was just what I had been hoping for, a big, round track headed away from Ash Mountain, and now I had it.

"Go on and get him!" I hollered to the dogs as they took out pretty fast on the trail. It looked as if nothing could stop us now. But in my excitement I had forgotten the clouds. Soon it was raining, then sleeting. The dogs could pick up the track now only under the larger trees where the rain had not yet penetrated. In spite of the persistent efforts of the dogs, progress was too slow.

After a while the rain turned into a thick snow flurry. We waited under a big fir tree for shelter until the sun came out, but the damage had been done. We spent the rest of the day circling farther and farther ahead trying to cut a fresh track

made after the storm; but old Long-Tail had evidently stopped for the day before it started to rain, and we failed to jump him out.

This was really getting serious—stymied on hot, fresh tracks three times in succession!

Returning to camp we ran on to a big black bear. The dogs stopped him in a thicket before he knew what was happening. They held him at bay until I rode up within forty steps; then with a big "whuff, whuff" at the dogs, he made off through the brush as if the devil were after him.

"Back, Pup! Back, Puse! Come back!" I hollered at the dogs, wishing it were a lion so I wouldn't have to call them off. Pup and Queenie came back, but Puse went on. When he got back to camp a couple of hours later, I could not tell whether he had stopped the bear again or not. I suspected he had just had a long run for the fun of it.

At camp I found Mr. Talle had brought me a likely-looking black and tan hound, which I had bought on trial. Talle kidded me quite a lot about not getting a lion where I said there were so many.

"I'll get you a lion before the month is out or you can have my job," I said. Later I had reason to remember that statement.

Three days later, anxious to try out Ranger, my new dog, I rode east to Juan Baca Canyon, hopeful of finding a track far enough from Ash Mountain not to get stymied there again. I did find some old scrapes, and further down hit a two-day-old track of Old Lady Scar-Heel. The young ones were not with her, and she was traveling in erratic courses as if hunting. We tried for hours but could not work out the track. Ranger was of no help at all, and we had to take a rain check on our date with the Old Lady.

A couple of days later on the passway back of Castle Rock, we hit that same big male lion, or so it seemed, that we had

lost in the rainstorm; and this time he was headed back toward the south.

Pup and Puse got going at once on the trail, which was not over five or six hours old. Here I thought surely Ranger would become interested and show his stuff, but he only followed behind my saddle horse and showed no interest whatever.

I had to ride like the devil to keep up. But had I followed the same route taken by the other two lions, it would have been all the same in the end. By eight o'clock we were again at Ash Mountain and again up against a blank wall—or perhaps I should say, a tumbled-down stone wall.

After working in the rocks a while, the dogs finally quit, sore-footed and discouraged. I sat there a long time on a rock trying to figure a way to beat this game. True, I had seen Old Lady Scar-Heel's sign in another area, and I could go and hunt her up. That wouldn't do, for who wants to give up a perfectly fine male lion for a little old female?

I hit on a compromise plan: I would get some No 4½ Newhouse traps which I had seen down at headquarters and trap me a lion. While I had never resorted to trapping of lions before, I had not the slightest doubt, with these lions following a definite passway, scraping again and again at the same places, that I could easily trap them, and the end justified the means.

So I got four traps and attached chains and heavy drags made like two huge fishhooks placed back to back.

Two traps were set in the canyon back of Castle Rock, adjacent to scrapes, in such a way that a lion passing over the route would be likely to step in one or the other. Two others I set in similar manner on the ridge between the head of Rock Creek and McChristal Creek, at a point where there were lots of scrapes and where the lions had been turning sharply to go up to Ash Mountain.

I felt confident of an early catch, and indeed it was with considerable interest that I anticipated the opportunity of witnessing the reactions of a trapped lion as a human approached him in a situation where he could not escape. Would he fight? Would he sulk? Or would he try frantically to escape? Those were interesting questions that I felt I soon could answer correctly. I had been in very close quarters with lions several times and had never seen one show any sign of attacking. On the other hand, little fear had usually been shown, for I had several times climbed the tree a lion was in and forced him to jump out by poking him with a six-foot pole. But then he was free to attack, or go, or simply stay. What would he do when he was trapped?

For three days straight I rode the trap line and caught one large bobcat, but no lions passed that way. The fourth day I had to miss.

The next day I rode the traps again. A male lion, apparently the biggest one, had gone south over the passway two nights before, but had missed the first two traps.

As soon as I came in sight of the second set, I saw that the lion had been caught. The ground near where the trap had been set was torn up as if two bulls had been fighting. Bushes were chewed off, and young spruce trees were badly clawed and chewed up. Obviously he had been frantic and exerted his full strength and agility to get loose.

But where was he? I began looking around, cautiously moving forward, expecting to see him crouching for a quick spring toward me or the dogs, should we come near him. A few steps at a time, I finally came to the place where the trap drag had been hung up on a small fir stump in the center of the threshed-out area. So he hadn't got out of the trap, but the drag had finally come loose, permitting him to run with the trap until the drag should again hang up.

of the month, you can have my job." But I needed the job the worst way, so what next?

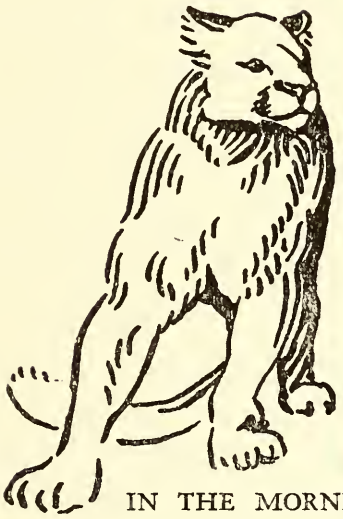
With only three days left of my first month, it was over near Bernal Creek that we hit a very good track of a male lion. The trail was headed northeast and I could see from the footprints in the soft dirt that he was not the one with two toes missing. Pup and Puse left out on the trail in a hurry and got clear away from me, and I lost them. I rode hard all the rest of the day trying to find the dogs, who, I felt sure, had treed the lion; but I failed to hear them. At dark I turned dejectedly, with a completely worn-out horse, back to Castle Rock.

I was sure that at that very moment, Pup and Puse were under a tree, somewhere, barking steadily as they looked up at a white-bellied, tawny body in the tree above them. But since I could not find them, what was the good of it? Just another bad break, or another piece of hard luck? No, it was worse than that—it was a jinx that was following me.

About daybreak the next morning the dogs came into camp, tired and sore-footed. An examination of their mouths showed plainly that they had been chewing brush and limbs. Their gums and lips were cut and bruised and there were a few small pieces of bark and wood between their teeth. That proved conclusively that they had treed the lion, for in their nervous anxiety to get at a treed animal they (as many other dogs do) would from time to time viciously chew on bushes or on the limb or bark of the tree the lion was in.

Neither the dogs nor I were in shape to hunt that day. We rested up for a final effort to get a lion on the following day, which was the thirtieth day I had been on the job, and maybe would be the last if I didn't get one. At least, that had been my proposition to Mr. Talle.

Chapter 4



Fur-lined Lioness

IT WAS THREE O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING OF MY THIRTIETH DAY ON THE JOB when I saddled Dixie, my best mountain saddle horse, and left Castle Rock in the pitch dark and rode west again toward Leandro Creek where it breaks through the Wall. The dogs, Pup, Puse, Queenie, and Ranger, followed on the trail close behind Dixie. There was no frolicking about as there had been on our first trip over this route a month before. They and I had had too many hard work-outs and disappointments for any of that.

It was barely daylight when we arrived at our first destination, that is, the break in the Wall where Leandro Creek passes through it. Here a game trail leads up the ridge to the north, paralleling the Wall itself. As we turned up this trail, the dogs got the faint scent of a lion. They picked up the scent from the bushes and low branches that protruded out over the trail in such a manner that a lion would touch them in passing.

In the trail were the tracks of a herd of elk made the evening before when they had come down into the canyon bottom to feed. The lion's tracks in the trail had been obliterated, as indeed had the scent on the ground also. Yet all three of my Airedales were much interested and continued to test the bushes along the trail, telling me as plainly as if they could talk that a lion had passed that way.

Ranger showed considerable interest in the elk tracks, and once gave tongue and started off back down the trail the way the elk had gone. I had to call him sharply to get him off the tracks. After that, for hours, he just followed along showing no interest at all in what the other dogs were working on.

As we climbed toward the top of the ridge, the dogs were still interested. Several times they made little side trips away from the trail where, apparently, the lion had passed over a number of old scrapes; but as no new scrapes had been made, I concluded we were following a female. The trail was not fresh. It had been made at least thirty hours before, and I seriously doubted the ability of the dogs to work it out if the lioness traveled far. There was one gratifying feature about the trail: it was leading straight away from Ash Mountain.

Finally, at the crest of the ridge, the track left the well-traveled game trail entirely, and for a time was much easier to follow. It turned down toward Bernal Creek. The lioness had wandered over the hillside as if she had been hunting. She had passed an old kill, a buck deer about two years old which had already been eaten up. She had messed around the carcass some, but apparently had not eaten anything or gnawed on the bones. She had gone a way down, very nearly to the flat behind Bernal Cabin, then turned back up the hill just a short distance north of where she had gone down.

The dogs were working very faithfully and persistently, Queenie giving tongue more or less regularly; but the progress

we made was quite slow. I had no difficulty in keeping up with the dogs at all times, and often would have to wait on them to work the track out of difficult places.

She had come back to the face of the cliffs along the crest of the ridge and worked southward to a break in the Wall through which there was a game trail. The track was plainly visible here in the soft dirt and dust in the trail. It was clearly a female of medium size. I had very badly wanted one of those big, old males first; but that day I was perfectly willing to compromise for a female, and so determined to concentrate all my efforts in making a catch before the day should end.

After passing through the gap in the Wall, she headed west across an open flat that lies between the Wall and the Costilla watershed divide. That was just fine, for I knew there were a few deer, although not many, on this east slope of the main divide. I was hoping she would be fortunate enough to make a kill, for in that event she would be near by. The track led up the slope for quite a way, then turned first one way and then another, as if the lioness had been hunting pretty earnestly.

It was now noon and we had traveled something like eight miles on the trail but had not gained any, and it was getting harder to follow all the time. A track is always harder to work after the sun has shone on it for a few hours. There was one advantage, though: this slope was not very rocky, the ground was soft enough that the track was easily seen in many places, and I could help the dogs in trailing when it became necessary.

We worked on steadily. The track led us halfway up the mountain and around to the south toward the upper part of Leandro Creek. Once we saw tracks indicating that a small bunch of deer had been stalked and a short run made after them by the lioness, but the tracks showed they had bounded away down the steep hill in safety. The lioness had not followed on

but had stopped upon missing her catch and had messed around for a little while. Then, abruptly, she had turned around the side of the hill, angling downgrade toward Leandro Creek.

From that point on, the track went straight, and hence was much easier for the dogs to follow. Looking into the canyon I could see the stream and a number of good, big beaver dams. Straight toward these dams she had headed, as if she knew where she was going, nor did she vary her course in the least until she had reached the dam. Here she did not cross the stream, but turned to the right and skirted the water's edge around the first pond. She then went on to the second dam about a hundred yards upstream. She had climbed out of the canyon bottom around the right end of the second dam, and spent a little time there, as evidenced by the dogs' finding her scent over an area a rod or more square. The dogs were now becoming excited and were working faster all the time. Their anxiety was reflected by accelerated wiggling of their stubby tails.

All of a sudden, Puse took out at full speed around the pond and crossed the creek in a single bound, yelping in steady, high-pitched, staccato voice, characteristic of him when he had jumped his quarry or hit a very hot trail. When he gave tongue, Pup and Queenie went to him—or rather, followed after as fast as they could—and soon all were in full cry and I was thrilled with the knowledge that we had jumped our lioness. Right there the trail had become at least thirty hours fresher. That indicated that a kill of some kind had been made and that she had stayed with it, feasting upon fresh meat.

I touched spurs to Dixie's sides and she loped around the pond, bounding over the tangled aspen poles which had been felled by the beavers. By the time we crossed the creek, I heard Puse, then Pup, then Queenie bark "treed"; and by their

vigorous, excited barking, I knew they had a lion. Now there was no use to hurry; so I tried to get Ranger interested, but he only sniffed around a bit where the lioness had evidently been lying up by a boulder, then trotted on silently ahead of me to the tree, but never once did he give tongue or show more than a passing interest. I determined right then to send him back, as the trial period had proved he was no lion dog.

As I approached the tree through the dense aspen and young spruce, I could see what I had been looking for for a whole month. There in an Englemann spruce tree about thirty feet from the ground, the lioness was lying quietly across a couple of limbs, her long tail hanging down and one hind foot awkwardly braced against a lower limb almost out of reach.

The highlights and shadows of the sun shining through the branches on her tawny side made her look spotted like a jaguar; but her gray-marked head and long, black-tipped tail were typical of a mountain lion.

"Well, I've got my lion at last," I said to myself.

Then remembering how, during the month, I had lost one lion after another that had almost been in the bag, I said, "Better put a bullet through her before you say that."

She showed no sign of fear as I rode up; in fact, she paid little attention to me but watched the dogs, who were by now making the woods ring with their excited barking. A time or two she spit at the dogs, cat fashion, in a bored sort of way.

We had worked hard for ten hours hoping to see this long-tailed cat up a tree before the day's end. Yet now that our goal had been reached, I realized that killing the beast would be an anticlimax. The day's thrills and excitement were over.

The real satisfaction and enjoyment of the chase are not to be found in the killing of the quarry, but instead are experienced along the trail in quest of it. The trail of an undisturbed

lion or bear leads through new and interesting country which one would not otherwise see. As the dogs work slowly on a stale old track a rare opportunity is afforded for one to observe many things of interest: the scenery, geological formations, timber and brush types, the herbage, perhaps a rare plant or flower, the different species of birds, rodents, and game inhabiting the area.

By watching the dogs as they follow the meandering trail of a lion, now hunting, then going on, passing by an old kill, or perhaps where a rabbit, porcupine, or deer has freshly fallen prey to sharp teeth and claws, one can get a clear insight into the interesting daily activities of the quarry.

Then, too, there is nothing that gives one more pleasure and satisfying enjoyment than watching and listening to a pack of well-trained dogs as they work out an old, difficult trail. The intensity of interest shown, the untiring persistence, the amazing ability of a cold-nosed dog, the coöperation of one dog with another, their reactions when the trail is lost, when found again, when the scent becomes dim, and when it suddenly freshens, are delightfully fascinating to observe.

But now that was all past; we were looking up at the lioness in the tree above us.

At that distance it was easy to put a bullet from my .45-caliber, single-action Colt six-shooter through her heart. She hung for a few seconds, then slowly slid backwards off the limbs on which she had been resting, and fell heavily to the ground. The dogs were instantly on her lifeless body, wooling it viciously with the greatest satisfaction I have ever seen evidenced by a pack of dogs. This was the reward they had worked for and been cheated out of a half dozen times during the past month. I let them enjoy themselves, in spite of the fact that the skin was being damaged, because they had earned this satisfaction.

When they were satisfied, I threw the lioness across my saddle and led Dixie back down to the beaver pond, where there was a little open park. There I put the carcass down, noting that the sides bulged out as if the animal had gorged herself to her ultimate capacity upon fresh meat of some kind.

Upon investigating I found where she had caught and killed a very large beaver near the upper end of the beaver pond, where it had been engaged cutting down an aspen tree. She had then carried the beaver across the creek and up the open slope for a hundred feet or so to the edge of the spruce thicket. There she had eaten the entire carcass except for the skull and a few of the larger body bones. But most of the bones and the tail, and even the feet, had been eaten. Not only that, but the skin and thick fur had been consumed completely.

At first while looking around the feasting spot, I thought perhaps the skin and feet and other remnants of the beaver carcass had been cached and covered over and that I had missed finding them. But when I cut open the lioness to remove the entrails before taking her on in to camp, I found I was mistaken. In her paunch were the feet, many chewed-up bones, and the skin of the beaver, which she had torn into pieces but some of which were still as large as one's hand.

Literally here was a fur-lined lion!

A post mortem investigation of a kill is not only interesting to a hunter but is actually a very valuable source of information as to the food habits of the species. Careful analysis of stomach contents sometimes reveals startling facts as, for instance, in this case, where the fur and feet of the beaver had been eaten. In this way a hunter can find out a lot of things that are helpful for future use. Examination of the mammary glands and reproductive organs of a female animal likewise often reveals valuable data.

Evidently the beaver had been killed two nights before, or early the previous morning, and a large part of the meat eaten then. The lioness had stayed right there for thirty hours or more, and as the meat was digested she continued to feast on the remainder of the carcass, eating the feet and skin last, but wasting nothing.

Further exploration revealed the fact that the lioness was carrying three embryo young, each about the size of a large field mouse. A veterinarian to whom they were shown later, after they had been preserved in a formaldehyde solution, estimated the embryo had passed through about a third of the gestation period, or a little more than thirty of the ninety-one to ninety-three days, which is the gestation period of mountain lions.

I then recalled that on my first day's ride just thirty days before, I had gone up the very same trail where we had struck this lioness' track and there had found sign, several days old, which indicated the presence of both male and female lions. The character and distribution of the scrapes and the amount of general milling around had indicated that mating there had taken place. The finding of this female in the same vicinity, carrying embryo at that stage of development, was satisfactory confirmation of my original impression.

I was mighty proud of the way my Airedales had performed, working steadily on a cold trail for ten hours, and stopping their quarry within a quarter of a mile when it was jumped. And it was with a great deal of personal satisfaction that I rode on back to Castle Rock with the lioness tied on behind my saddle to show the cowboys that I could still take a lion. Mr. Talle heard about it from one of the cowboys and drove up that evening just to see the kill.

It had been my privilege through the years to find many species of animals killed by lions. Most of these were deer;

Above a beaver dam a lion had killed and eaten a large beaver

Dixie, with Pup, Kate, Puse, and Queenie

some were porcupines; quite a number were colts and grown horses; two were large mules; a number were cottontail rabbits; one a snowshoe rabbit; quite a few sheep; a very few calves and yearlings; one wild turkey; two skunks; and a tassel-eared squirrel. But this was the first time I had found where a lion had killed a beaver. Yet this one's action in going straight to the beaver dams after failing to get a deer suggested that perhaps it was not a new experience for her at all.

Chapter 5

Adventure With An Elk Fawn

THE MONTH OF MAY WAS A BUSY AND INTERESTING ONE AT VERMEJO PARK. THE twelve thousand head of cattle had to be moved from the winter to the summer range. Great herds were rounded up in the various pastures and driven to the west side of the ranch to fatten on the luscious forage in the meadows, parks, and aspen grazing areas of the Costilla and Comanche Creek drainages.

Young calves and weak cows which had wintered badly made the drives slow and tedious. Cowboys worked twelve to fourteen hours a day, seven days in the week. They never complained so long as they had good grub to eat and good horses to ride.

Game also shifted range as the grass, weeds, and browse forage became green and the aspen began to leaf out. Many of the elk had already gone back of the Wall and across the divide. The remnant bands which had tarried in the low

country were now slowly working their way westward. Only a few stayed low to summer on the same range where they had wintered.

Deer were much less migratory. But the mountain turkeys chose the aspen and spruce areas to nest in, and raised their young in the parks and meadows adjacent to forest cover essential for protection against their enemies.

One day I was riding in the Rock Creek aspen thickets right after a belated four-inch snow had fallen. It was the tenth of May, but in this high mountain country there are snow flurries sometimes as late as June. I came upon a turkey hen sitting on a nest with sixteen eggs in it. She let me walk up to within three feet of her before she left the nest, which, half concealed beneath a snow-berry bush, still afforded an open, downhill take-off for quick flight from a prowling enemy.

Further on we came across the tracks of a very large bear which had been made only a few moments before. Pup and Puse craved a chase, and I had a little trouble keeping them back. I promised them if they would leave it alone, we would try to find a lion track for them. With alertly cocked ears and brief wags of their stubby, bobbed tails, they told me as plain as words, "All right, you are the Boss, but this is a helluva strong smellin' bear."

Instead of a lion track we soon crossed the track of another bear with two little cubs following her. The cubs had been frolicking in the snow, chasing each other, and wrestling much as two boys would do. No, I didn't see them, but when there is snow on the ground the record of animal activities in the forest becomes an open book.

I followed along for some distance, just to read in the snow a few paragraphs from Mrs. Bruin's diary. It recorded the fact that she had turned over a lot of rocks and chunks and

torn up several rotten logs in search of insects for food. It said: "I'm hungry and I'm having a time finding enough food to make milk for my babies; I'll have to hurry along and find another old log, and some more rocks, maybe an ant hill."

"Hell!" I commented. "That's a rather piddling way for such a big, noble animal to make a living, anyway, isn't it?" Perhaps, though, it's better that way than to incur the enmity of stockmen by killing cattle and eating beef.

Puse and Pup came up alongside my horse, looked up at me, heads cocked first to one side and then the other, and then looked eagerly in the direction the bears had gone and said in unison, "We'll get those bears for you in a jiffy if you'll let us, and we would sure like to."

"Nope. Get back! No bears today," I said.

Just a week later, on the seventeenth day of May, I rode over to the Gold Creek country to check up on the movement of elk to their summer range and also to see if there was any lion sign back toward Devil's Mesa. As usual Pup and Puse were with me. A couple of miles back of the Wall on Gold Creek, we left the road and went up the steep slope to the north of it. We took a zigzag course along the hillside because it was so very steep.

We had got some distance up from the road into the aspen timber when I stopped to breathe my horse, for the steep climb had begun to wind him. Just above us there was a little flat bench land in the aspen at the edge of a strip of Douglas fir timber. While my horse was resting, the dogs began sniffing the air as if they had scented something on up the hill. Of course, from below we could not see what was on the little flat above us, but evidently something was there.

Pup and Puse didn't show the interest and eagerness that is always evident when a lion, bobcat, or bear is winded; and since they never paid any attention to deer, and had now

learned to leave elk alone, too, I was a bit puzzled as to what had attracted their attention. With their noses high in the air, sniffing with an attitude of uncertainty combined with curiosity, they worked slowly on up the hillside. My interest was aroused by their peculiar actions; so I followed them to see what it was.

I turned my horse straight up the steep hill, and we soon topped out on the edge of the bench land. There, not a hundred feet away, stood a large cow elk with ears forward, nervously watching first me and then the dogs, which were a little ahead of me. I rode on toward her. The hair on her neck and withers rose; then she hesitatingly moved slowly away. Now I suspected what it was all about.

"Back, Puse! Back, Pup!" I said, and rode over to where the cow had been standing. There lay a newly born, dappled elk calf, apparently not over an hour old, for he was not entirely dry yet. About forty feet away the mother turned to watch lest we harm her new-born baby.

"Get on back now!" I scolded, as the dogs started to come up when I got off my horse. Certainly they would not have attempted to harm the little fellow, but mama elk didn't know that, and if they came up close I was afraid it would cause her to fight us all in defense of her little one. Elk are good mothers; and as it was, with the dogs staying back a hundred feet or so, the cow exhibited great concern for the safety of her offspring.

"Hello there, young feller," I said as I went up to pet and examine the spotted little youngster.

"You sure haven't been here long, have you?" I lifted him up, but he was all limber and his long, crooked legs were wobbly and he couldn't stand. In fact, he didn't try.

"Hey, look out there!" I yelled, and ducked behind my horse as the mother elk, with the long, dark hair on her neck

and withers all bristled up, and chewing vigorously, charged right at me. She came head-on as if she intended to butt me over and stamp me to death, but when only ten feet away, she lost her nerve and stopped. I peeped over my saddle and there, eyes blazing, she stood and glared at me. Then she turned her whitish-yellow rump toward me and walked slowly away, her nose held high in the air, and her hair still all ruffled up.

About forty feet away she turned around, stamped her foot, and snorted as much as to say, "Go on away; can't a body even have a baby without some man thing snooping around?"

"Get!" I said. "I am not going to hurt your baby." Again she snorted her disbelief and stamped defiantly.

I went back to the dappled little fawn and petted him and rubbed his floppy ears, and he didn't seem to mind. "You're a mighty little fellow to ever grow up and carry a great big set of antlers like your dad had last fall when he was courting your mother, aren't you?" and I felt of the barely perceptible little pedicels on his head which would, in years to come, support a mighty set of antlers.

"Doggone it, go on away before you hurt somebody," I hollered as once more mama charged, coming closer than ever this time before stopping. I threw a stick at her to make her go away. She probably was only bluffing, but to be on the safe side I had dodged out of sight behind my horse. When she had once more retreated to her old stand, with a look of outraged defiance, I went back to my new pet.

At first the thought occurred to me to take him home and make a pet of him sure enough. Then I decided that would spoil his whole life, and the thought was promptly dismissed. But some way I was fascinated by this hour-old babe in the woods.

I noted that his spots were much the same in pattern as

those of a mule deer fawn, but he seemed a little darker in color otherwise; and he was a lot larger. He would have weighed about thirty-two or -three pounds. Foolishly I had not brought my camera and could not record pictorially the finding of the youngest game animal I had ever encountered in the woods.

I rubbed his long, gangling legs briskly with a flour sack I had carried my lunch in, and dried him off good. I wanted to see what he really looked like, and how long it would take him to learn to stand up. His hoofs had soft, white temporary soles, which would soon wear off when he learned to walk.

"Puse! Pup! Back! You've got no business around here," I said to the dogs as they again became curious and started to come up to where I was. "Go back now, you'll make mamma fight sure enough if you come up around her baby." They retreated reluctantly.

The little fellow was becoming livelier all the time.

"Oh! you're just doing fine, shaking your head and trying to get up all by yourself." He didn't seem to know what it was all about yet, but at the rate he was progressing he soon would find out.

I lifted him up again and placed his white-soled little feet in the right position, and steadied him a bit, and he stood up for the first time. For a moment he stood there swaying unsteadily; then he shook his head, lost his balance, and fell over on his nose.

Before I could pick him up, his mother charged in for the third time. A cow elk is docile-looking enough, in normal aspect; but with the long, dark hair on her neck and withers turned the wrong way, her jaws champing menacingly, and snorting, as she charged head-on, right at me, this old cow didn't look so nice. Instead she looked like a mad, long-legged wild boar on the fight.

Whether or not she would have actually knocked me over, I don't know, but all the same, I got out of her way.

When, after a few minutes, she had again gone away, I came out from behind my horse. The little fawn lay there with his long, slender neck stretched out flat, his ears laid back, and his nose on the ground as if trying to hide from me. As he lay there in the open stand of grass and wild peas, it was easy to see how the dull white spots on his neck, sides, and thighs over the yellowish-brown base color, served as a camouflage. The sun was shining through the budding aspens, dappling the whole area with spots and patches of highlights and shadows, much as the young fawn was dappled with his protective baby covering. This spotted coat he would outgrow and discard in about three months, for one much like his mother's. His new coat would be fine, like fur beneath the coarser hollow hair, to keep him warm during winter's cold and snow.

His big, bright eyes really were the only conspicuous thing about him, and seemed out of harmony with his camouflage coloring.

Many biologists and others contend that a young game animal is entirely devoid of odor of any kind. This, it is claimed, is just another of nature's ways of protecting the young from their natural enemies. Whether that be a fact or not, the older elk certainly have plenty, and one can often smell their musky odor when they get out of their beds, even when they get away without being seen. This spot where the cow had lived for a day or more and bedded down several times and had her baby, was certainly pretty smelly. Small wonder the dogs had got wind of it at a distance and become interested.

I petted him and rubbed the fawn's nose and ears.

"Come, now, let's see if you can't find out what your legs

are for." Then I rubbed his sides briskly and he tried to get up; with a little help he made it, too, and stood all spraddled out to brace himself. He turned his head from side to side slowly, looking around with his big, bright eyes, as if trying to figure out what this new world of his was like, anyway.

Then he began nuzzling up and down my chap leg, instinctively searching for that which would supply him with his first warm meal.

"Hungry, eh! Let's see if that's what you really want." I forced my middle finger into his mouth, letting the palm of my hand press lightly against his nose, as would his mother's udder when he grasped one of her four teats to nurse.

After a moment he cupped his little tongue half around my finger and began to draw, very lightly at first, and then actually to suck. He became more interested and eager, but when he got no results for his efforts he nudged my hand, just as a cow's calf hunches to start the flow of milk, and lost my finger.

"Well, young fellow," I said, "if you're that hungry I'll get away and let somebody feed you who can." I left him standing there, got on my horse, and rode up the hill almost out of sight. There I stopped to see what would happen.

The mother elk, hair now laid down the right way, came very cautiously back to her baby, smelled of it all over, then began licking it about the head, neck, and ribs. In her growing enthusiasm to finish the job I had so rudely interrupted, she licked him too hard and he fell over. I knew he would soon be up again, for he had learned in a brief two hours of life to stand alone, a feat which takes a human child a year or more to accomplish.

"Good-bye and good luck. I'll be seeing you some time," I said. "Come, Pup! Come, Puse! Let's get out of this maternity ward."

As I rode away through the aspen, I became absorbed in speculation as to what lay ahead for the little elk fawn who, though he could not realize it, had started life with a most unusual episode. Would he grow to maturity or fall prey to some predator? If he lived, would he be just an ordinary bull, or would he become a monarch of such prowess that none would dare challenge his domain? Would he live on through his natural span of life, then decline, and finally die a natural death? Or would he, in his prime, fall a victim to a sportsman's gun? Would his head and antlers become a prized trophy to adorn some hall or den—possibly my own?

Chapter 6

Cripple-Foot's Big Mistake

IN RIDING OVER THE RANGES AT VERMEJO PARK, I NOTED THAT THE ELK usually came out into the open parks at night to feed, and it seemed that their principal food consisted of the fine, short grasses and palatable weeds. But they do browse some on the same plants that deer and cattle like.

Heavy browsing was often evident around their day-bed grounds in the timbered areas. They seemed particularly fond of aspen leaves and tender twigs. I noted aspen thickets where many aspen from two to four inches thick had been straddled down and broken off at a height of four to six feet, by elk, evidently to get the leaves from the crown of the saplings after stripping the lower branches.

Elk also have a unique habit at times, principally in winter, of barking aspen trees for food. A strip of the outer bark from an inch to an inch and a half wide and two to four inches long is peeled off by an upward stroke of the lower front teeth.

Like other ruminants, they have no uppers in front, a fact of which the average person is unaware.

I found the range generally too heavily stocked with cattle, hence considerable competition between cattle and game.

The palatable browse plants on the accessible portions of the winter range were far too heavily used. In areas less accessible to cattle, but heavily stocked with deer and elk, these plants were in fair condition.

While cattle are principally grazers, yet when grass is short or covered by snow, they have to subsist upon browse plants, such as mountain mahogany and oak, which are also the principal deer foods. I found there, as elsewhere, that cattle damage browse plants more than deer do, because they take much coarser stems and break down the plants much worse.

While elk do a lot of shifting around over the range, summer and winter, the rule there was that they summered in the higher areas and wintered lower down where the snows were not so deep. But some elk, particularly mature bulls, do winter high and battle it out with the elements. I noted one particularly interesting instance of this habit.

One day about the twentieth of May, while riding back toward Devil's Mesa, I noted several freshly shed elk antlers in a little two-acre park in the aspen timber at the crest of the mountain. I began looking around for more and trying to match up those that I had found. In a couple of hours, my search over an area of about five acres in and adjacent to the opening resulted in the finding of twenty-two matched sets of elk antlers, all of which had been shed within the past two years. There were some singles and no doubt I missed others.

Here was ample proof that elk do sometimes winter high, for this place was at an elevation of at least 9,500 feet, and the antlers are dropped in February and March when the snow is

deepest. Why had they congregated here to shed their antlers? I pondered that question and looked around to find the answer.

This spot was on the southeast shoulder of the mountain, with very steep slopes falling off to the east. Evidence of huge drifts of snow just over the brink of the hill indicated that this open spot was exposed to severe winds and had been swept clear of snow much of the time. Apparently the bull elk had congregated here on this windswept, bare ground in search of food when adjacent areas were snowed in. This just happened to be during the period antlers are dropped.

While searching for elk antlers, by pure accident I came across a lion's track in the dry dirt under a Foxtail pine tree. It was too old to follow, but it interested me greatly because the outer lobe of the heel of the left hind foot was missing.

"Old Lady Scar-Heel, sure as shootin'," I said to my dogs. "What's she doing away up here?" This was fully twenty miles from where I had seen her tracks in Juan Baca and Pooler Canyons. I wondered whether she had brought her litter of young long-tails up here, or if she was just on one of her wide, wandering sorties and the kittens were still in the country where I had last seen their sign. Whichever way it was, the wide-ranging tendency of the long-tails was indicated.

"We'll get her one of these days," I promised Pup and Puse as we started back.

On the way home we came across a band of about twenty-five elk, mostly young cows and yearlings just back of the Wall. In the band was one very large bull who brought up the rear as they moved away. His new antlers were very well started, appearing as thick, hairy nubbins fourteen to sixteen inches long, with knobs on the sides, where the brow tines would develop.

It is rather unusual to find the large bulls with the cow

herds at this time of year. Usually the bulls seek the more secluded spots and abandon the herds while growing their new antlers.

By the twenty-fifth of the month, the oat crop which Mr. Talle had asked me to put in was all planted and that job finished. I had also covered the ranch fairly well except for the Costilla side. I had found lots of old lion sign, and twice had had barely workable trails which, for one reason or another, did not pay off. But I had not had time to seriously try to get another lion. I found many more old carcasses of deer that had been killed by lions during the winter and early spring. Truly the loss had been heavy.

Another dog, old Kate, half red-bone and half blood-hound, had been ordered and received. Kate was a big, good-looking red bitch, by far too fat and soft to be of much immediate use. She would have to be put into condition, her feet hardened, and she would have to get used to me and my Airedales before I could expect much from her. I needed her most to give tongue on the trail so that I could follow the pack without having to keep in sight of them. Silent trailing was the worst drawback I found to most Airedale hunting dogs. Her deep voice promised to be a great help.

It was near the end of May when I went out for lion in earnest again, and as I had done so many times before, I went back of Castle Rock to the old lion passway. As before, there was plenty of sign that the lions were still passing that way, but none fresh enough to follow. I was elated, though, when in the trail near some scrapes, I found the unmistakable track of the big male lion that had lost two toes in my steel trap. I had been afraid he would leave the country. He was headed south and I was glad, for once, the trail was not fresh enough to follow, for it would likely have ended on Ash Mountain as before. I craved his fresh trail headed north; and I made

up my mind to cut this passway every morning until I should get it. We worked around toward Carrizozo Canyon but found no fresher sign. We came in home, content to wait until Cripple-Foot should come through the other way.

Kate showed some interest in the scrapes, and her general appearance and actions were encouraging. Perhaps she would turn out much better than Ranger. I certainly hoped so.

The next day it was raining and useless to go for lions; so I got in several saddle horses and shod them, preparatory to some anticipated hard riding. As a matter of fact, I had been riding very hard, putting in extremely long hours every day. Three hundred and sixty thousand acres is a lot of territory in mountain country for one man to cover.

It rained all day, just a slow drizzle, and did not quit until after midnight. There wasn't much chance the next morning of picking up a fresh lion trail made between the time it had quit raining and daylight, but I did not want to let Old Cripple-Foot get by going north without being right after him. So we went out, leaving Castle Rock at daybreak and riding west up the canyon toward the nearest point on the passway where I had been finding so much sign.

To my astonishment we found Old Cripple-Foot's big round track half a mile before we got to the crossway, hot-fresh, made after the rain had stopped, and headed right up the trail the way we were going. If he turned right at the crossway, that would be fine; if he turned left, we would try to get him before he got to the rock slides.

"Stay back!" I said to the dogs, and I got off to examine the track to see for sure that it was Old Cripple-Foot. Then I got back on my horse quickly and said, "Get him Puse! Sick 'em, Pup!" They were off at full speed up the trail. Even Kate on her first lion track, and still far too soft for such work, opened up with her deep voice and took right to the trail.

She could not keep up with the pace of Pup and Puse, and neither could I.

At the old passway they turned to the right as I had hoped, and I followed on up the hill as fast as I could. Pup and Puse yelped a few times as they always did on a very hot trail, but they had not yet jumped their quarry when they went out of hearing over the ridge.

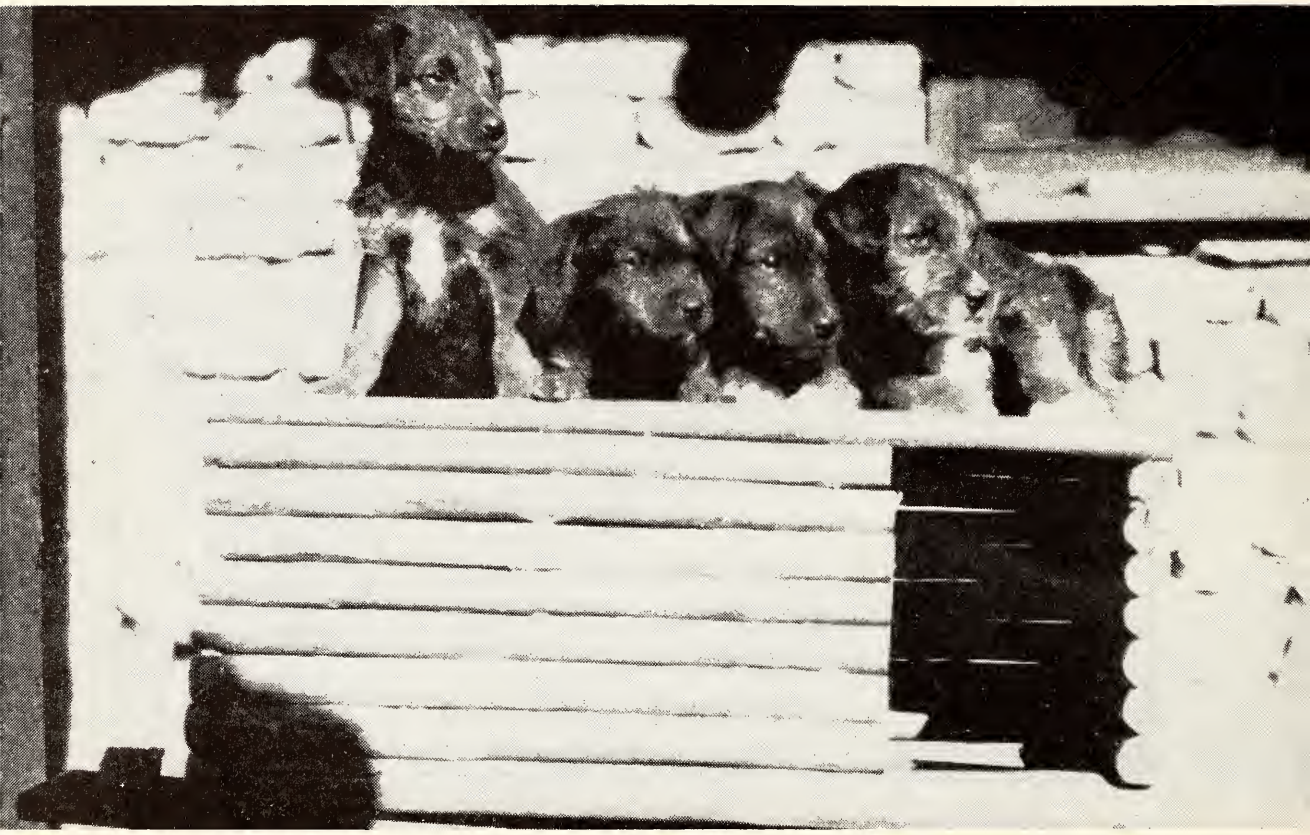
I was feeling pretty high, as I followed on as fast as my horse could carry me up the trailless, steep hillside out of the canyon. I felt sure that Old Cripple-Foot had made a fatal mistake.

Where the dogs went down into the next canyon was pretty rough country, and I remembered there was a trail a half mile up the ridge that led off to the Adams Lake Mesa, toward which the lion was headed. I thought I could make better time by going that way and cutting back later. I had got ahead of old Kate as we climbed the hill; and when I took off up the ridge to hit the trail, she became confused and followed me instead of the Airedales. That just suited me, for I figured she would be a help in picking up the trail again when I circled to cross it, if the Airedales were out of hearing.

So we went lickety-split up the ridge to the trail, then down it in a lope, and did not stop until we were near Adams Lake. Here we stopped to listen and were rewarded by a most welcome sound—a sound that always gives me great satisfaction, for it tells me that my dogs have faithfully done their part; and as a signal that the crisis of the chase is at hand, it never fails to thrill me and quicken my pulse.

Back to the right, in the canyon, less than half a mile away, the dogs were barking "treed" with unmistakable eagerness to get at Mr. Lion. That meant they could see him and that he probably was not far up in the tree. Kate heard them,

The author with Dixie and his dogs; left to right, Puse, Kate, and Pup



Puse (left) at three months was alert and smart

too, and whined as if she knew what it meant and wished she were there; then she went straight to them. There was now no need for me to hurry; so, as my horse was pretty well winded, I took it slow and Kate beat me to the tree. She opened up with a deep bellow that could be heard for miles. There was no mistaking it: she now knew what it meant to tree a lion.

Arriving at the spot, I found Old Cripple-Foot standing quietly on a big limb of a very large yellow pine tree, not over twenty feet from the ground. He was a handsome and very large, chunkily built lion. He calmly watched first me and then the dogs, his long, black-tipped tail slowly moving from side to side as I rode up and dismounted. I drew my .45 Colt's from the holster, ready to shoot. Then I hesitated as there passed through my mind the events of the several chases we had had when I had come out second best. I thought: "Old Timer, it is too bad that it must end this way."

I was glad, all the same, that it was this way rather than in a trap.

He was so close that I put a bullet through his brain and he toppled off his limb and was stone dead by the time he hit the ground. The dogs wooled him with great satisfaction, then lay down with dripping tongues and panting for breath, to rest while I gutted the lion.

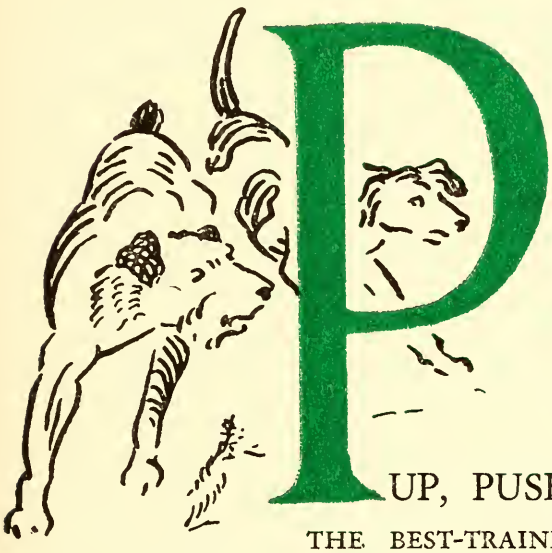
I looked at my watch and it was not quite eight o'clock. A piece of good luck to balance the bad had at last fallen to my lot.

My wife and two young daughters had joined me at Castle Rock a few days before, and they were astonished that a lion should be found so close to the house. Leaving the girls at camp, my wife went back with me when I went to pack the lion in. The long-legged, snorty bay horse I had been riding was not the kind that will stand for having a lion packed on

his back; otherwise, I could have brought it in at once, for it was not three miles from Castle Rock.

Both Mr. Talle and Skeet Williams, the foreman, felt that the bunch of mares and colts in a nearby pasture would now be much safer, for a lion loves horseflesh and often takes it where he finds it, whether it be "broom tail" or thoroughbred.

Chapter 7



My Dogs Had What It Takes

PUP, PUSE, AND QUEENIE WERE THE BEST-TRAINED DOGS I EVER HAD. THEY were trained to hunt, to work and fight, and they loved to do just that. I had taught them absolute obedience in essential matters. They were entirely loyal to me and tried, at all times to accomplish what I indicated that I wanted them to do. They worked together admirably, yet they differed greatly. Each had his own personality and his own way of doing things.

Queenie was a little, perfectly marked, straight-haired Airedale. She had a stubborn streak in her, but was very smart and calculating to an extent that her actions often were indicative of advance planning. For instance, a neighbor's hogs got into my field a quarter of a mile from the house. I called the dogs to go chase them out. Pup and Puse went after them at top speed, but Queenie wouldn't go. Instead, she leisurely trotted down to the side of the road where the

hogs had come in, and then she lay down in the grass and waited. In a few minutes the hogs came by on the run, with Pup and Puse right after them. Timing her actions perfectly, Queenie caught a sow by the butt of the ear, and held her there until I went down and made her turn loose. She thought I wanted a hog and planned it so she could catch me one with the least effort.

Queenie wouldn't follow me when I rode away from the house unless I had a gun. Show her the six-shooter or rifle and you couldn't make her stay back. She liked to hunt and she knew perfectly well I wasn't going hunting unless I had a gun. She was an excellent trap dog and would work persistently for a coyote when he got away with a trap.

Queenie was thirteen years old when I was at Vermejo Park, and slowed down so much by age and the bearing of pups that she was of little use except to help me follow the other dogs, for she barked on a trail some while the others ran silently until the track became quite fresh.

She was a prolific breeder—a large litter of pups twice a year if permitted; and once she gave birth to an even dozen. In almost every litter sired by an Airedale, there would be one natural bobtailed pup. Students of genetics are agreed that acquired characteristics cannot be transmitted to the offspring. Yet Queenie did it many times, though perhaps she didn't mean to.

Pup was a fairly large, huskily built Airedale, with light-brown back and sides, and nearly white below. He had medium-short hair, and a very short bobbed tail. His eyes were inquisitive and intelligent, his ears alert. He was two and a half years old when I picked him up as a stray, and in gratitude for the home I gave him, he became the most devoted dog I have ever owned. Through all the years I had

him, he would follow me everywhere I went if permitted to do so.

He was completely loyal to me and my family and would fight for any of us if he thought we were in trouble. He was deliberate in his actions and sure in his decisions. He was afraid of nothing, accepted any challenge, and welcomed a fight with dog or wild animal no matter what the odds were against him. I never saw him fail to acquit himself with credit in a fight, although often the odds were too great to be overcome and sometimes he had to be carried off the battlefield. He was just a little too determined and self-confident for his own good.

When I was at Vermejo he was thirteen years old; but, though battle-scarred, he was as active as a dog of half that age. At eighteen, he was still able to tree a lion. When he died at the advanced canine age of twenty-one, his hair had all turned perfectly white. He was a great dog.

Puse was Queenie's son, but Pup was not his sire. Instead, his sire was a highly bred Airedale with a pedigree as long as your arm. Puse was medium-sized and a typical Airedale in shape and color but excelled the average in intelligence, speed, and endurance. He was very smart, quick, and impulsive. Never did man and dog get along better than he and I, but he did not show the worshipful devotion that Pup did. Puse took the attitude that we were partners; Pup that I was his master.

Always alert, Puse had great initiative, was sure of himself, but acted on impulse rather than deliberation. He specialized in taking short cuts to unravel a trail, and was so fast that he would get right up on a cat or a lion before they knew they were being chased. He was fearless, and the going never got too bad for him to follow his quarry.

He could come nearer telling me by his actions just what

he wanted to than any dog I ever worked with. The different ways he would cock his head, first on one side and then the other, prick up or lower his ears, wiggle his stubby tail, bark, whine, and jump around, all had their meaning which I learned to know as well as he learned to understand what I said to him.

There were mighty few chases he was ever on, no matter whose dogs he was with or what the competition, that he was not the first one to the tree. I fear there will never be another Puse.

I found that in training a hunting dog, it is essential above all else to teach him his name. Teach it to him so that he recognizes it when spoken under any circumstances. It is, therefore, important to give him a short name, easily understood, and susceptible of great emphasis. No two dogs in the same pack should have names that sound alike.

Puse was originally named "Pusillanimous" by my, then, young son; but it was soon shortened to Puse. Pusillanimous may have fitted him as a small pup, but it surely did not fit at all when he grew up.

Often when riding through game country, I found it desirable to have the dogs stay behind. I could accomplish that merely by speaking the name of each dog and then saying "Get back" or "Get behind." The three would then follow close at the horse's heels. Then if I saw predator sign that I wanted to know more about, I would stop and look back at the dogs, say, "Puse! Here, see what it is," and Puse would come around in front and test the sign, telling me by his actions, not only what had been there, but about how fresh it was. Or if it was Pup or Queenie that I wanted, they would come while the other two stayed back until I would tell them to "go on" or "go get him."

They loved a lion trail; and if it turned out to be a fresh

lion track that one dog was testing, the others would quickly recognize that fact by his intense interest and tense actions, and would sometimes have to be told again to "stay back." There was an entirely different reaction to a coyote track than to a bobcat or a lion. It would always cause the hair to raise on their necks, and they would act resentful that a coyote had been there, and sometimes half snort and half growl as they tested the track. It was plain that they didn't like it. But when they could catch a coyote, they loved to fight him and kill him.

They were pleased when they found either a lion or a bobcat track. They showed that they wanted to go and showed no ill temper at all, but all interest and anxiety to find him. The difference between a lion and a cat was in the degree of the same reaction rather than a different reaction. Intensity of interest, eagerness, and an all-absorbing anxiety, born of anticipation for what they knew they would find at the end of the trail, were characteristic of their actions upon finding fresh lion sign. As they were silent trailers, except when the track was very hot, one had to watch their actions rather than listen to the tone of voice, as one does with a hound.

But they were as good bobcat dogs as you will find anywhere. I recall one day in late November at the Park soon after a sixteen-inch snow had fallen, we went out in the turkey winter-range country to try to cut down the bobcat population. Ordinarily I have found the bobcat harder to tree than a mountain lion. Of course, they don't travel as far as a lion and many more of them are caught each year, because there are so many more of them. But the individual cat can pull more tricks and get away from the dogs, after being jumped, oftener by far than a lion.

But when there is a deep, fresh snow on the ground, they are greatly handicapped, and the finding of a fresh track

usually results in a quick catch; so it was that I wished to take advantage of this snow to pick up a few bobcats. The snow was soft and had blown off the trees pretty well and had melted down to six or eight inches on the steep south slopes.

Old Kate was not in condition to hunt and Queenie was slowing up so much with age that I left them both at home. I knew Pup and Puse would get the job done anyway, and with snow on, I could always be sure of following them up to find them if they did make a long, fast run.

After riding three miles or so over into Gachupin Canyon, we struck the track of a very large cat and followed on the trail for a couple of miles before we jumped him. He had been hunting and had killed one rabbit and a tassel-eared squirrel, and then, with a full belly, had taken to some sunny cliffs to "lay up" for the day.

The dogs were trailing silently and were right close on to him before he knew it, and they saw him as he left his bed in the rocks and bounded off down the hill. Both dogs followed in hot pursuit, barking at every jump, and forced him to take a tree within a quarter of a mile. I shot him and quickly skinned him, tied the skin on the back of the saddle, and started on, hoping to have another track soon.

In a short while, on a ridge top we struck the track of, not one, but three bobcats. One was a fairly large one and the others much smaller. I surmised it to be an old mother cat with two half-grown kittens, and that is what it proved to be.

We trailed the three to some big rocks on a sunny slope and jumped them out. They ran along the sunny south slope for quite a distance, giving the dogs a little trouble on account of the great number of deer tracks where a sizable herd of deer had been feeding, and bounded away as we approached.

Finally one of the half-grown kittens took to a small yellow pine and I just luckily saw it as I approached, because the dogs

had gone on after the others. I shot and skinned the kitten as quickly as I could and then hurried on after the dogs. I kept watch for the other kitten as I rode along, for I was sure it would be the next to tree.

While a bobcat (or a lion, for that matter) will not stop and fight the dogs to protect its young, it will run on and on, leading the dogs away from the trees in which the young have taken refuge. It is my belief that they do this deliberately, just as some birds will flutter along the ground, feigning a broken wing, to lure one away from their nest or young.

I expected this old bobcat to run quite a distance after the second kitten treed. Soon I heard the dogs barking "treed." I rode on to the tree and, as expected, found the other young one. I shot it out and when the dogs had wooled it a moment, I made them stop and sent them on after the mother cat. I took time—perhaps ten minutes—to skin the kitten, and then followed the dogs, feeling sure that they would have no difficulty in treeing the mother cat; but I was entirely wrong.

She had crossed the ridge into a deeper canyon with a very steep southern exposure, where there was not much snow left, and what there was by now was pretty wet, causing little scent to be left. In this type of country, the tracks showed that she had circled and dodged and run for some time, keeping ahead of the dogs. I lost some time in trying to make out where they had gone and in getting through some pretty rough areas where she had led. I couldn't quite make out why the dogs had not finally crowded her enough to make her take a tree, for I could not hear them at all.

At last I came to where she had made a long, straight run along an open slope, with the dogs evidently right behind her. Of a sudden, I rounded a bend, and there, stretched out on the snow, lay the big, spotted, bedraggled bobcat, stone dead, while both Pup and Puse were wallowing in the snow

and rubbing their heads and shoulders in it to clean the blood off. From the blood on the snow, it looked as if they must be cut up pretty badly.

What had happened was that the bobcat, a large female, had taken refuge in a hole in the rocks, thinking she could defend herself there rather than take a tree. To get her out required a lot of stamina and intestinal fortitude, and I would have given anything to see it done.

The hole was about seven feet deep in the solid rock of breccia formation, and sloped downward very slightly. It was almost round and less than thirty inches in diameter at its mouth, and tapering to about a foot at the back end. I crawled partly in it to figure out just what had happened.

From the blood and hair at the back of the hole, it was evident that the bobcat had gone to the end and turned around to fight off the dogs. One of the dogs had gone in and faced teeth and razor-sharp claws to bring her out. There was not room for both dogs to work, side by side. Pup had a habit, in a fight of any kind, of boring in and taking all his opponent could give, for the sake of a throat hold. That is just what he had done here.

He had faced teeth and claws in a direct, frontal attack, where no strategy or maneuvering tactics could be employed. He had gone head-on into all that cat had to give, which was plenty, for the sake of getting a neck hold; and when he had got it, he had held it and dragged the bobcat out where Puse could help him kill it. The fact that the cat was dead right outside the miniature cave, showed that Pup had never released his hold.

That act, I believe, took more nerve than anything I ever saw a dog do.

Pup was pretty badly cut up around the head and was bleeding profusely, but was not seriously injured. In his life-

time Pup had to be carried home three times, and sewed up a half dozen times, from cuts received in fights with bears and lions. But this time, he was able to walk in, and needed stitches in only two places near his eyes.

Puse was not badly scratched, but just enough to show he had been in a fight. I have no doubt that Puse would have finally gone in and got that cat, but he was younger and not quite so deliberate and determined in a fight as Pup, and the older dog seized the opportunity to do so first.

The cat's skin was badly torn, but I took it off anyway, and rode on home with the skins of the whole family tied back of the saddle.

Chapter 8

June, the Year's Nicest Month

JUNE, IN THE BEAUTIFUL NEW MEXICO MOUNTAINS, IS THE VERY NICEST month of the year. By then the snow, except for drifts which still cling to the leeward side of majestic peaks, has gone. Streams, swollen and muddy in April and May, from the melting of winter's accumulation of snow, have by then run down. As the streams recede and become clear again, the native trout, flashing his bright-red belly, becomes active, rising readily to a deftly cast fly.

The days are warm and sunny; the nights cool and refreshing. There is little rain. Instead, day after day, the incomparably deep-blue skies are cloudless, while winter's gales have been tempered to gentle breezes. Wildflowers blossom profusely, their colors, some of brilliant, some of delicate hues, adorning the landscape and their fragrance pervading the air. White-trunked aspen support verdant crowns of quaking, trembling leaves.

Herbage is green everywhere and on its nutritious and succulent qualities both domestic stock and wild game become sleek and fat. Birds of many species, which returned with spring, have tarried to nest, and the air is full of their activities and their songs.

In June all nature is alive, virile, and active.

In June the young of birds and mammals alike begin timidly to explore the new world into which they have so recently been introduced. In this new, realistic world, if they are to survive, they must quickly learn to shift for themselves, and to depend upon their own resourcefulness for food, shelter, and the means of escape from their enemies.

Those who have had the opportunity to spend a June in the seclusion of our magnificent mountains and make first-hand observations of these phenomena are indeed fortunate. But one misses a great deal of beauty and many thrilling experiences if he fails to be abroad by sunup. It is in the early hours of the day that wild creatures are most active and it is then that their ever-alert movements are easiest to observe.

At Vermejo Park, June was a wonderful month. I was in the saddle every day by sunup, and more often than not, before daylight, for I wanted to know what was going on.

One morning before it was light enough to see well, I rode into a little band of mule deer in my horse pasture, within a quarter mile of the house. Accustomed to feed there at night with the saddle horses, they did not seem to realize there was a man on this one until I was within a few feet of them. Then they scampered off a few yards and stopped to watch me ride on out of sight.

While riding early a few days later, in the Juan Baca Canyon, almost directly east of the main headquarters, I ran onto a mule-deer doe with a pair of little spotted fawns. These big-eared, gangling babies were not over ten days old, and their

gait still rather wobbly as they followed close to their mother's heels. The doe had not seen me, and I was afforded an opportunity to watch them for a few moments. They had been out in a little grassy park, and the mother was leading them back into the brush to bed them down for the day. After they had gone into the brush, I rode over that way.

The doe saw me and, with head lowered, froze in her tracks, thinking perhaps that I had not seen her, and permitted me to approach within about forty yards before she bounded away up the hill and out of sight into the brush. I left my horse and walked into the brushy place where she had stood, and began looking for the little ones. I was sure they had not followed their mother as she bounded up the hill.

After looking carefully, I found them, about ten feet apart, lying flat on their bellies, with their hind legs awkwardly spraddled out, noses stretched out close against the ground, and great, big ears laid back on their slender spotted necks. As they snuggled down to the ground in the weeds and grass, they were hard to find even when I knew they must be right there. Had one not known they were there, they never would have been seen even if one had walked right by them, for their camouflage was perfect.

What signal the doe had given to cause her babies to lie down and hide, I could not tell. They were following at her heels when she went into the brush and until she stopped to try to hide from me. Perhaps it was then that she told them to get down out of sight and stay there until she should return. For they had snuggled down as close to the ground as they could and remained there motionless, while she had run away at my approach.

I caught them each in turn, as they made no effort to escape until I had my hands almost on them. They were buck and doe and not over ten days old, at most. That was about

the eighth of June. I have seen fawns in the northern part of New Mexico as early as May thirtieth, but I think most of them are born between June fifth and June thirtieth. In the southern part of the state, especially at low elevations, they come from a month to six weeks later.

Apparently the period of fawning has, in a general way, become adjusted to the time that green, succulent forage is normally available in the different areas. In the northern section, the green forage comes in abundance in May and June, the country having had enough winter moisture to produce it as soon as it is warm enough. Farther south, there is a little very early green herbage, but usually it dries up again and does not flourish until the July rains set in; so there the fawns come from the middle of July on.

On the other hand, there may be other factors connected with the difference in fawning time. In the northern mountains, the snows are deeper, the winters more severe, and they set in earlier than in the southern section. Perhaps the need for the fawns to have their winter coats and to be far enough advanced by the beginning of winter to survive, influences the date of the mating season and resulting fawning period.

God forbid that the little dappled fawns should be caught in the deep snows and blizzards before they shed their thin, spotted baby coats, as "Bambi" was in Walt Disney's beautifully animated biological atrocity of that name. But then Disney didn't bother to have the bucks shed their horns in spring and grow new ones through the summer months either.

I rode on down the canyon, crossed the ridge, and came back up Pooler Canyon. While I saw lots of deer, no more evidence of fawns was noted, indicating that those I had seen were a bit early.

I found where a lion had killed a deer and, while it was not fresh, it looked as if kittens had been there; so I checked around

some ledges of rock a half a mile around the hillside, hopeful of finding some fresher sign.

There, to my surprise, beneath a cliff, was the Old Lady's track in the soft dirt, the scarred heel identifying her as well as a fingerprint does a criminal. The track was old, but made since those I had seen twenty miles west at Devil's Mesa nearly three weeks before. What an elusive rambler she was!

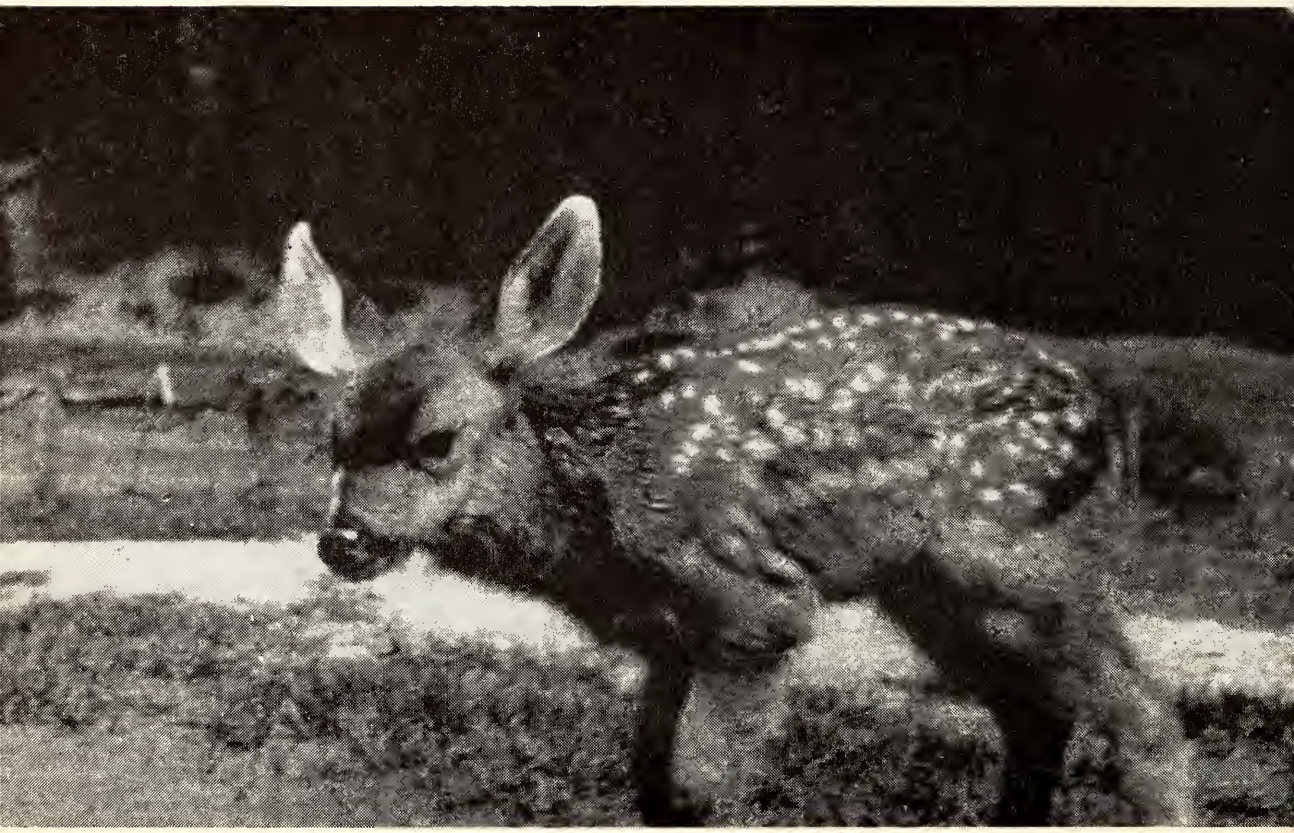
"Some day she'll make a fresh track for us," I said to the dogs, "and then her deer-killing days will be over." This was near the place where I had first seen her scarred-heel track when her young ones had been with her. Perhaps my hoped-for date with her would be in this vicinity.

Later in the month I rode over to the Valle Vidal by way of Shuree Park. There was lots of elk sign in this area, and back in the aspen there were many tracks of elk calves, now beginning to follow their mothers. One could see where they had been frisking and playing while their mothers had grazed on the tender grass in secluded, marshy glades.

Near a clump of aspen and spruce timber at the north edge of Valle Vidal, I rode up onto an old turkey hen with a dozen or so poults. They were pretty small yet, barely able to fly. As I approached, the hen fluttered off a few yards, trying to toll me away from where the little ones had hidden in the tall grass. They were almost impossible to find, but I flushed some of them and they laboriously flew up onto low limbs of nearby trees, where they perched awkwardly on the swaying branches. Here in this high, grassy mountain valley were plenty of insects, principally grasshoppers, and an abundance of tender, green shoots and buds, making it an ideal habitat for the rearing of young turkeys.

I spent the night at La Belle with Scotty Helm, a cowboy, the sole inhabitant of this once-flourishing gold mining town which at one time had boasted of a population of fifteen

Old and battle scarred at sixteen,
Puse was still able to tree a lion



Spotted mule deer fawn

hundred people. Now, like many other ghost towns of the West, there was no apparent reason why it should ever have existed.

The next day I rode down Comanche Creek to the Costilla River, and up past the reservoir to the Bungalow. There I inspected some beaver dams and other workings in Long Canyon. At one place there, the beaver have built a dam to form a ditch a hundred yards long, around the side of a hill, to divert the water from the stream into a natural basin. By putting the water into this basin, which would otherwise be dry, they have made themselves a lake of some two acres in extent.

At another place farther upstream, there is a man-made ditch, constructed for the specific purpose of diverting water from the same stream into a series of small, natural basins. The beavers did not approve of this at all, and we were unable to keep this ditch open. During the summer, I cleaned it out time and again, but the very next night these busy little amphibian engineers would dam it up tight and cut the water back into the stream.

By what logic did these beavers figure that filling the one natural basin justified a tremendous lot of construction and maintenance work on their part, while refusing to permit man to fill other, and very similar, basins in the same manner? He who can solve such riddles is wise indeed.

That night I spent at camp No. 1 on the main Costilla, where Joe Hewitt, with whom I had camped at first at Castle Rock, was now stationed. This time I got into camp ahead of him and, making myself at home, pitched in and got supper ready by the time Joe showed up, surprised to find me there.

A cowboy out in his lonely camp gets pretty tired of his own cooking, be he ever so good a cook, and I think Joe really enjoyed my baking-powder biscuits, even though they did not compare with those he could make with sour dough.

The next day I visited the prairie dog poisoning camp and conferred with Homer Pickens, the foreman for the United States Biological Survey. White-tailed prairie dogs were exceedingly plentiful over much of the open areas of the ranch, doing great damage through their destructiveness to forage and causing erosion by their diggings. Hence, a crew of men had been employed, under supervision of the Biological Survey, to work the country systematically, putting a small bait of poisoned grain at each burrow.

A few days later we cut for lion sign back of Castle Rock, and hit a fair trail headed south. We followed it through some new country to Shuree Park and lost it there in mid-afternoon. This long-tail had by-passed the Ash Mountain rocks and led me through a regular passway to the south. Therefore, it seemed probable that Ash Mountain was the end of the regular route of some lions where they turned back north. That was why they had so persistently gone into the rocks there. Perhaps this one had a turning point farther south. Mr. Ritchie, a Biological Survey hunter and trapper, had told me there were lions using the area between Ash Mountain and Cimarron Baldy and he was trying to get them.

In my ride a great many old deer kills made by lions—one horse, a few porcupine, and other things—were found on this property; yet I never did find sign indicating that a lion had killed an elk. This seemed a bit strange, because there were plenty of elk in many parts of the lions' range, especially along the Wall. There can be no question of a lion's ability to catch and kill a cow elk or a young animal. Surely they could offer no greater problem than a good, stout horse, or a very large mule, which I knew they can and do kill. But after all, we find the lion a little eccentric in his tastes, if ours are to be used as a standard. Rarely does he kill cattle to enjoy a good, juicy steak, but instead prefers a prickly porcupine or an old

buck deer whose meat in winter is strong and unfit for human consumption. Sometimes he will kill and eat a skunk, too! Perhaps he just doesn't like elk.

My wife and I were riding along a high ridge one day when our attention was called to a clump of low oak bushes which the dogs were circling, evidently having scented something. They were acting very strangely. Ordinarily I could tell by their actions about what was interesting them. But this time they showed extreme caution, if not fear, of whatever they had scented. We rode over to where they were and at first could see nothing; then Puse ventured into the bushes rather cautiously, and not a foot from his nose lay a four-foot diamond-back rattlesnake.

"Back, Puse! Back! Get Back!" I called to him, fearful that he would tackle his unusual find. But the snake had not coiled, and remained still. It was early in the morning and at this elevation, which is about nine thousand feet, it was quite cool yet. That, coupled with the fact that the snake had swallowed a wood rat, accounted for his inactivity. The dogs, of course, were used to seeing small water snakes, but that was their first experience with a rattler.

I shot his head off with my six-shooter, and then I skinned him. I have a strong natural aversion to snakes of any kind, and there was a sickening odor about this rattler that I didn't like. It was the first and the last snake that I ever skinned.

At only one other place have I ever seen a rattler at a higher elevation, and that was on San Antone Mountain in northwest Taos County, where we used to find them as high as ten thousand feet.

One early morning in late June, I was over above the Pina Flor Camp, near the Colorado line, when a coyote started "yap, yap, yapping" at me from in the brush on the opposite slope, some two hundred yards away. I tried to get a shot

but was unable to do so. But the coyote kept up the yapping until I finally sent the dogs after it. They chased it away off up the hill, but of course couldn't catch it, and soon came back. No sooner had we started on than the coyote began again to bark at us from almost the same place it had been before, having followed the dogs right back.

So I went over to see what it was all about. There were lots of coyote tracks over the hillside, and at first I thought there must be a carcass of some kind, but I could not locate it. A moment later, Puse had found what it was and was barking viciously at the mouth of a hole under a big rock. It was a coyote den, and the pups were inside. We tried for quite a while to get them out but had no luck. The hole squeezed in between the rocks so that we could not enlarge it, and a dog couldn't get through.

All the while we were working at the den, the mother coyote was barking at us from the ridge above. Several times the dogs gave chase, but she would be back as soon as they were. She was mighty careful to keep under cover, as if she knew that I had my rifle that day. I thought to come back later and get these pups. But it was a month before I got over there again and they had moved to some other location, and I could not find them.

That same day that we found the coyote den, we found a party of natives that had been fishing in Ricardo Creek, contrary to the rules of the Club, and without state licenses. There was plenty of evidence that they had caught quite a lot of fish there, in violation of law. But when I caught them, they had gone back across the Colorado line and, of course, I had no authority to make an arrest in another state; so I had to let them go with a warning.

And so most of the month of June passed, with much of interest being observed, but not a great deal being accom-

plished, except to become familiar with the area and the game and predator situation there, which I felt would be of value later on.

All the same, June in the New Mexico mountains is a most enjoyable experience for any one, and a satisfying treat that is not soon forgotten, but instead likely to be recalled when winter's snows lie deepest.

Chapter 9

Leading a Dog's Life

BEFORE I WENT TO VERMEJO PARK, TWO BIOLOGICAL SURVEY (NOW Fish and Wildlife Service) trappers had been stationed there for several months. They were efficient coyote trappers and had done good work. Elmer Watts I had known before he had gone to work for the government, and Mr. I. T. Ritchie had trapped Coyotes on my cattle range west of Las Vegas several years before, where the coyotes had been killing deer. He had cleaned up the situation very nicely there, and could be depended upon to do a good job on predator control anywhere.

Mr. Ritchie was a good lion hunter, also, but had sustained a back injury which prevented him from doing the rough, hard riding that is necessary if one is to be successful. He had disposed of his fine pack of lion dogs, a fact which he sorely regretted when he found lion sign so plentiful here on this ranch. As a matter of fact, he had worked here several years

before as a lion hunter and made an outstanding record for himself.

These men stayed on the Park for a while and then were moved to other locations. Mr. Ritchie, during June and July, was camped at the McChristal place on the C S Ranch, just south of the Vermejo Park boundary and only seven or eight miles from Castle Rock.

Seeing so much sign stirred the lion-hunting fever in his veins again, and he had got a couple of dogs to try and pick up some of the long-tailed cats. Unfortunately it did not pan out as well as we had hoped. The dogs were not the trained lion dogs that they had been represented to be, and he did not have any luck with them.

Several times during June he had struck good lion tracks just south of where I had had such hard luck east of Ash Mountain. Three different times his dogs made a good run on the track, and he would hear them in the distance, barking "treed." In each instance, before he could get to the tree, the dogs would leave it and come back to him. He would urge the dogs to go on back, but before they would get to the tree the lion would be gone. He said it was a large male lion that had got away in this manner several times. Mr. Ritchie said he thought this lion had been run previously and let get away after being treed.

It was heart-breaking for a good lion hunter to have his efforts thwarted by a pair of dogs that trailed well but refused to stay long enough at the tree, or perhaps even to actually locate the tree in which the lion had taken refuge. Some dogs just don't have the treeing instinct, and are difficult to teach to find and stay with the tree in which an animal has taken refuge. That kind of dog spoils a lion so that he soon gets so he won't stay treed at all, and upon that fact hinges the incident that I am about to relate.

After three failures of this kind, Mr. Ritchie had asked me to come over to his camp in order that we could go together and see if we could pick up this lion. I knew that if we did, my dogs would stay at the tree. It was on a very fine morning, late in June, that I started out to his camp. Unfortunately, I had been delayed for more than an hour on some other business, and it was sunup before I left Castle Rock.

It was just about as near to Mr. Ritchie's camp to go up the Castle Rock Canyon to the lion passway that I had worked on several times, and then ride south across country, as it was to go by Van Brimmer Canyon. Besides, I had a hunch that I might strike a fresh trail by following the former route; so that was the way I went.

Soon after we topped out into the aspen country at the head of Rock Creek, the dogs hit a very hot trail headed south. The track was not on the regular passway but somewhat to the east of it. They all, Queenie, Kate, Puse, and Pup, opened up on the trail and made the woods ring with their baying and yelping. I felt sure it could be nothing less than a lion, but it was at least a half mile before I saw any sign to prove it (if proof other than the testimony being given by my four reliable dogs was needed). Then I glimpsed a fresh scrape under a big pine tree, as I galloped after the dogs.

From their excited, high-pitched voices, I knew the trail was hot-fresh, and Mr. Lion would have to take to a tree very soon, and that is just what he did. When the dogs barked "treed," the sound of their sharp-cut, eager voices thrilled me as it always does. Tingling with anticipation, I slowed my sweating horse down to a walk, and without haste rode straight toward the tree. When within about a hundred and twenty-five yards of it, I could see, through an opening in the timber, the dogs frantically barking up a large, bushy white fir tree. From their actions it was evident that the lion was either

perched on a very low branch in plain sight, or was coming down the tree.

Then it was that I saw a big, yellowish-red, long-tailed lion, not twenty feet from the ground, backing down the tree. It was too far for a shot with my six-shooter, which was all I had with me. I touched spurs to my horse and he galloped on as fast as he could, and I yelled a couple of times, thinking I might scare our long-tail back up the tree; but no such luck. When he was about fifteen feet from the ground, he jumped and took out over the ridge at a tremendously fast pace, the dogs right after him as he went out of sight.

He was a beauty, very sleek and fat-looking, with well-colored, reddish sides and a white belly, and contrasting markings about the head. He was as handsome a lion as I ever saw, and the picture of him bounding away, tail high in the air, and the dogs right after him, is as clear in my mind today as the day it happened.

At first I thought nothing much of the incident. I had seen lions do that before in a number of instances, and occasionally had had a lion jump out several times before I got a shot. Then it occurred to me that this might be Mr. Ritchie's lion, and if so he might be a bit difficult to get close enough to for a shot. When I topped the ridge, the dogs were again eagerly barking "treed," in the very bottom of a sharp canyon, about a quarter of a mile away. I rode slowly and as quietly as I could, keeping out of sight behind timber, thinking to leave my horse when I got within a couple of hundred yards, to sneak up on him from behind cover.

When I got off my horse, out he came again, this time leaping from a height of thirty feet or more onto the slope on the other side of the draw. In this way he gained a few yards' head start on the dogs, but they caught up with him just over the top of the first ridge and forced him up another tree.

This time I rode only halfway up the slope, left my horse, took off my chaps and spurs, better to go quietly, and made a circle to come in from a different angle than he would expect. I got within about a hundred yards and was trying to locate the exact tree he was in, when he either saw, smelled, or heard me, for out he jumped again and bounded off down the slope into McChristal Canyon. This time he ran over half a mile; and when he took to a tree, it was not a hundred yards from a long strip of stack or slide rock that extends down from the Wall and Ash Mountain above.

So that was it: he was making a desperate effort to get into the rocks, and if he made it, perhaps we would have difficulties sure enough. I could determine the location of the tree only by the baying of the dogs. I made up my mind that I must find some way to get close enough for a shot with my .45 without him seeing me and jumping again. He had seemed content to stay in the trees as long as the dogs were there and I stayed a long way off; but each time, as I approached, the lion had jumped—so he was afraid of *me,* not the dogs.

If I had had my .32 Winchester Special rifle, I could have shot him at the first tree; but I did not want to risk a pistol shot at more than fifty yards, and would much prefer twenty-five for a sure, clean kill. A wounded lion dropped out of a tree in the midst of a pack of dogs might do great harm. I couldn't risk getting a dog killed or badly crippled, even if I had to let the lion get away.

After a few moments' cogitation, I hit upon a plan which I hoped would work. It seemed worth a trial, anyway, and I could think of nothing better to try to get me out of the predicament.

The lion had gone off the ridge down into the canyon, angling just a little upstream toward the rock slide. The location of the tree he was in, as nearly as I could determine,

was about a hundred yards from the end of the slide. Between the slide and the canyon bottom, there was a strip of thick aspen and young spruce, perhaps fifty to seventy yards wide, with an occasional larger fir and spruce tree in it. At the end of the slide, the cover was not so dense, as there was only scattering aspen with a few large fir and spruce trees. The last hundred yards was too open to hope to stalk the treed lion, for he had too much the advantage from his lookout tower, so to speak.

I rode up the ridge for over three hundred yards; then, being sure that I was out of sight, I left my horse and took off my spurs and my hat and left them there. Then I went quietly down into the canyon at a point about three hundred yards upstream from where the lion was perched in his tree. While I felt that I could walk quietly up to within a hundred yards of the tree without being seen or heard, I dared not risk it. I went only to within twice that distance.

There I got down on my hands and knees and began to bark like a dog as nearly as I could, for I had decided to make Mr. Lion think I was simply another dog coming up to join the pack at the base of the tree.

The ground was rocky and I was glad I had left my leather chaps on to protect my knees. They needed more than that before I had crawled that two hundred yards through brush and over logs and sharp-edged rocks.

When I first started to pretend I was a dog, I will admit that I was puzzled whether to be an Airedale or a hound. I first decided I would be a hound because it seemed easier to imitate the bellowing of the hound than the shrill yelping of an Airedale. Then I thought, *if I am to be a hound, I should have a long tail; and if the lion notices that I haven't, he may discover the deception.* Therefore, my final decision was to be an Airedale.

As I crawled along I kept yelping and barking as nearly like old Pup as I could.

One can't go very fast through a rocky thicket on all-fours, with chaps on, but at last I reached the end of the rock slide and the edge of the thicket. I could now locate the tree the lion was in, about where I figured it was. When I had approached a little closer, the lion could be seen, about thirty-five feet up in a Douglas fir tree, lying quietly, with one front leg thrown over a limb and his hind feet braced against another. I was still too far to shoot.

I started on across the intervening space with confidence that the ruse would be a complete success. By now I was getting a bit hoarse from barking and wished I had chosen to be a hound instead of an Airedale, for the hoarse voice would have been more natural. Perhaps the tail would not have been so important, after all.

Did you ever have your dog call you a damn fool? Well, mine did! They came to me several times and said it with their actions just as plainly as if they could have used the words. They would come to me and say, "Quit foolin'! Get your gun, and shoot that lion! Please!" Then they would rush back to the tree, barking more vigorously than ever. But their coming and going, back and forth from the tree to me, was good strategy—by keeping the lion's attention on their movements more than on me. I didn't care what their temporary opinion of me was, for I knew they would forget all about it at the crack of the pistol.

When within thirty feet of the tree, which put me within about forty-five or fifty feet of the lion, I cautiously drew my old reliable .45 Colt six-shooter from the holster on my chap belt, then crouched on my haunches, and drew a bead on the lion's big, round head, aiming right between the eyes as he looked unconcernedly down on us dogs, and let him have it.

He slid backward off the limbs and fell to the ground stone dead, with a heavy lead slug through the brain. The dogs wooled him good, and I was so delighted that my strategy had worked and by now was so accustomed to being a dog, that I was tempted to join them.

He was a truly beautifully marked lion, with vivid, contrasting coloring, fat, fully mature, and fairly large, but not old. He was well worth a pair of sore knees, a hoarse voice, and the humiliating criticism of my dogs.

I went back for my horse and rode him down to near where the lion lay. I tried hard to pack the lion on him, but this pony's name was Cyclone, and he lived up to it by positively refusing to permit me to do so, and I had to give it up.

I really wanted to take the whole lion in, for I needed the meat for dog food. My dogs were all very fond of raw or cooked lion meat, and in my opinion it is one of the best meat foods for hunting dogs.

It was only a couple of miles down to Mr. Ritchie's camp; so I went on down there. He was very much pleased at what had been accomplished, but sorry he had not been in on the fun. He was sure that this was the lion that had been getting away from him and his dogs. He loaned me a pack horse and I went back and packed the lion on into Castle Rock, literally dog tired from my day's work.

Chapter 10

A Picnic Dinner Spoiled by Smoke

IN MANY OF THE MOUNTAIN COMMUNITIES WHERE I HAVE LIVED, IT HAS been customary to celebrate the Fourth of July by having a neighborhood picnic. Some suitable spot along a fishing stream or a bench land overlooking a valley, or perhaps a little park in the forest is selected, and all the neighbors are invited to come and bring some part or parts of the dinner for all. The gathering together begins at nine or ten o'clock, with the first arrivals at the spot setting right in to get things ready for a sumptuous feast, such as can be provided only by the good housewives of country folk.

By noon all will have arrived, and a lot of talking and joking takes place as the meal is prepared. Children of all sizes and ages are playing games or romping on mother nature's green carpet, having a glorious time. A fire has been built and coffee made and some of the "vittles" warmed up. Perhaps trout, caught by some of the early arrivals, are being fried in

skillets over the open fire, or it may be chicken, or beefsteak too thick for ration points.

When the table, consisting of a couple of tarps or wagon sheets spread on the grass, is set, there will be grub enough on it to feed a company of soldiers, and a variety of delightfully prepared foods to satisfy the most discriminating epicureans.

At Vermejo Park, it was not a neighborhood as the term is commonly used, for we had no neighbors closer than twenty-five to forty miles. Everyone in this community was connected in one way or another with the Vermejo Club, from manager down to the horse wrangler. All the same, Mr. Talle planned an old-fashioned mountain picnic for the entire Vermejo Park family connected with the operation of this great 360,000-acre cattle ranch and game park. The site selected was on a beautiful bench land near the Costilla Bungalow, overlooking the broad river valley. A green aspen forest, leaves trembling in the breeze, lay back of it, while on the grassy slopes below, wild flowers of varied hues blossomed in great profusion.

At the appointed hour, we had gathered for the traditional Fourth of July picnic celebration, and a gay crowd it was—twenty-five or thirty of us in all—with lots of jollying going on as dinner was being prepared. (There, we still had dinner at noon and supper in the evening.) At last the feast was spread and we sat down to enjoy a meal of traditional quality and variety, expecting to take time to do it justice.

Mr. Talle said, "If none of you folks is going to ask the blessing, I'll just say, it looks like good bread and good meat, so Good Lord, let's eat."

Mr. Irwin said, "Pass them biscuits and let's get started." We had just got started when Ted Paddock, one of the cow hands who was late getting there, loped his sweat-covered horse right up to the table and hurriedly dismounted.

Mr. Talle said, "I can't blame you for wanting to get to this dinner in a hurry, but there's no cause to ride your horse like that; we would have saved you something, anyway."

"That dinner looks mighty invitin'," said Ted. "Too bad you boys aren't already outside of it, because there won't be time to do it now. There. . . ."

Jake broke in with, "Why? You expecting to horn in and eat it all?"

"Shut up," Ted said, "and listen to me. As I came over the hill back there about five miles, I just happened to see a pretty big smoke, way down in the Horse Camp country."

Everybody went tense. It was a forest fire, and that meant action at the earliest possible moment—quick, decisive, planned action—to stop the fire from spreading. There had been little rain through June, and the forests were dry, especially in the eastern part of the ranch. During the past few days there had been a few local showers, accompanied by lightning and thunder. They were not general enough to wet down the forests, but instead, greatly increased the hazard of lightning-caused fires.

"You mean that?" said Talle earnestly.

Ted said, "You know damn well I didn't ride Nig like that to get to no picnic."

Talle said, "I'm sorry, Ted; just where is the smoke and how big is it?"

"As near as I could figure, it's on the other side of York Canyon, but this side of Caliente—somewhere between—in left of Horse Camp. It's a good-sized smoke, too."

Mr. Talle knew that I had had ten years and over of field experience with the United States Forest Service, and had spent many long days fighting fire. Therefore, he turned to me and said, "You better take charge of that; just what do you want us to do?"

The author crawls over logs and sharp-edged rocks

Some of the pelts of bobcats, lions, and coyotes taken at Vermejo Park

I said, "All right, if you want me to; but you know what we've got to do as well as I do. For one thing, we want to get to it as quickly as we can, but it's poor policy to go to a fire on an empty stomach. Let's finish our dinner as quickly as we can and plan out what we are going to do while we are eating."

We did that, but it was no longer a picnic dinner. The smoke had smothered the mood and dulled the appetite for a picnic.

We went in cars and trucks back to headquarters, which was directly on our route but only about halfway to it. At headquarters we got tools for a crew of ten men. Long-handled shovels, heavy rakes, heavy "nigger" hoes, axes, and a cross-cut saw were assembled. We also took canteens with water, some canned tomatoes, and some other ready-to-eat provisions. We took the tools, provisions, and water, and eight men in two pick-up trucks, to try to get as close as we could to the fire in this manner. We were not sure we could get very near it with a truck if it were where it looked to be. So to be safe, we sent two men in a car down to Horse Camp to get horses there and then go directly to the fire with tools for two men. That would insure getting men on the job soon, even if the fire could not be reached, or we could not get anywhere near it, with the trucks.

Fortunately, we were able to work around hills and canyons and side draws in this rolling country east of lower York Canyon, and get within a mile of the fire. By this time, it was nearly four o'clock and the fire was going pretty good, red flames lashing out at the dry grass and needles, in piñon and juniper timber on the south slopes of the little ridges, and pine timber on the northeast slopes. There was breeze enough to make it plenty hot and cause it to spread fairly fast, while dense brown smoke boiled high up into the air.

We hurriedly carried the tools and water over a couple of ridges to the west edge of the burned area and made our plans of attack. By now it looked as if about a hundred acres had been burned over, but the fire was not in a particularly dangerous area. The wind was from the west, and as the ridges and canyons ran from northwest to southeast, the wind was blowing across them. The result was that the fire was not spreading westward to amount to anything; in fact, on the west side, in some grass areas, it had gone out. To the south it was spreading slowly, but on the northeast and east side it was burning briskly.

It is usually futile to attack a fire from directly in front if there is much wind. Instead, it can be worked from the sides and pinched out. Since this fire was not spreading much to the west or south, we began work at the northwest corner of the burning area, to work the north side first.

I went ahead with an axe to mark out the firebreak we were to build. We were able to work right on the fire line, but to shorten our line and eliminate much hot work, I cut corners along the irregular burning line, from one salient to another. Another axeman followed to cut brush and an occasional log. After him came men with rakes who raked out all inflammable material they could from a path three to four feet wide. Next came men with the shovels and hoes to clean out any inflammable material the rakes had left and to be sure to get down to the mineral soil. One man, with a shovel, was left to patrol along the finished line, as we forged ahead, to see that the fire didn't break over, and to set back fires all along our firebreak, where we had made it back away from the actual fire line.

We made good progress from the top of a little ridge where we started down into a draw, across it, and up over the ridge, and down into the next draw, which was considerably deeper

than the first. The fire had just crossed this draw and was burning and spreading briskly up the slope, but had not got more than half up it. Although we had worked hard and fast and were wringing wet with sweat, we put out an extra effort to beat the fire to the top of the ridge. I knew that if we could do that, we could build a firebreak down the sparsely timbered ridge much more easily and quickly, and that it would be more effective than if we had to build it along the northeast slope of the hill in the pine timber where there was a deep mat of dry, highly inflammable pine needles.

A fire is one thing that travels much faster up hill than down, and we just did make it to the top of the ridge far enough ahead of the fire to be able to use the ridge upon which to build the firebreak across the main front. Again, if we were to be successful, we must work as fast as possible. It is always that way on a forest fire. No matter what you do or how hard you work, it seems that there is always, just ahead, another job that needs to be done so badly that still another extra effort must be put forth.

But it seems to me, fighting a forest fire is not unique in that respect. That is the way I have found life's work: always something ahead that justifies an extra effort.

Fortunately, we found the going quite easy down this ridge and we worked fast, in spite of the heavy smoke now blowing directly to us and stinging our lungs. After we had made a good break for a quarter of a mile, I sent one man back to set back fires all along the inside of the line we had made and to patrol that section to see that the fire did not get across.

The rest of us worked on down the ridge and for the last fifty yards had to work right on the fire line, which, by then, had reached the ridge top. A little, well-used cow path along the ridge, which served as a base for the firebreak, is all that

saved us. But we made it, and as we passed on a considerable distance beyond the fire, we could see that our extra efforts had been justified. We had not had as hard a fight as we would have had if we had let the fire get into the bad, timbered country over the ridge.

Although working as hard as I could, I glimpsed the track of a lion in the path on the ridge, but there was no time then to check it further.

We had been on the job now about two hours, going in high all the time, but we dared not rest for long, or the fire would burn down along the break and go around us. We must now work back along the south side to prevent that from happening. Always another job ahead!

Much to our relief, the two cowboys who were to come on horseback had now arrived, and gave us some much appreciated help. With the enlarged crew, we made good progress around the south side of the fire. The west end was not wide and the fire was not burning at all strongly against the wind. It was now getting pretty dark, and we could see every bit of the burning line where there was live fire; so we just whipped it out back to where we had started, rather than build a fire line. By nine o'clock we had it all surrounded and, by keeping a couple of patrols on, we could rest. One of the boys rode back to the trucks and got the provisions, and we ate a hearty supper.

The wind had died down now entirely, and the fury of the fire had subsided all around the front. Inside, there were still a number of dead trees, snags, and old logs burning brightly, sending red sparks high into the air. Should the wind come up, there would be danger of these sparks and embers being blown from burning trees across our firebreak. Then, too, there was always the danger of a smoldering fire following a rotten root of a tree underground, across the line,

to come to the surface again in inflammable material. Patrol would be necessary for a couple of days anyway; but there was no need for more than two men.

It fell to Ted's and my lot to stay with the fire. We kept the two saddle horses and the little remaining grub, and about a gallon of water that was left. About ten-thirty at night Mr. Talle and the others, who needed badly to get back to their respective jobs on the morrow, left and went back to the trucks and drove on home.

Ted and I spent the night patrolling the firebreak to see that a blaze did not start up outside. We worked on all danger points along the line, covering the burning roots and stumps with dirt to put out the fire, and throwing loose, burning chunks and the like, back into the burned area. It was a long vigil, but we dared not attempt to sleep at all. When daylight came, we were dirty and tired. We ate a little breakfast, for a little grub was all we had left; and we found that in our haste to get to the fire, we had not brought any coffee. A cup or two of coffee would have been mighty welcome through the night as well as for breakfast.

Mr. Talle was to send a truck back that afternoon with supplies and bedrolls; so we would just have to work and wait.

The morning was a long one, but as we worked the fire line, it seemed each time around to be safer than before; in fact, as Ted said, "We had it dang nigh out."

In our rounds we had, of course, been looking for signs to determine how this forest fire got started. We finally located it. On the ridge top near the west central part of the fire, a green pine tree had been struck by lightning and had set fire to a dead log, which had lain against the tree. The log had now been burned out but the ashes showed where it had been, and the lightning scar on the live tree was right fresh.

The lightning had obviously set the dry, rotten log afire, and it had spread from there.

With the fire danger at a minimum now, I took time to check up on the lion track which I couldn't help seeing in the cow path on the ridge while laying out the firebreak. I followed the trail on past where we had worked and was surprised to find it was the Old Lady's track going down it. The telltale scarred heel print could not be mistaken. She was alone, evidently on one of her long trips.

This was many miles from Juan Baca and Pooler Canyons, which seemed to be her headquarters, for that was the only place I had seen her kittens' tracks.

The track was not over two days old and by far the freshest I had had of her. But I did not have the dogs, and besides the fire job came first. I bet Ted a dollar I would get her some day.

About eleven o'clock, some very good-looking clouds came up and we began to have hopes it might rain. With the clouds, though, the wind got up, and about noon, on one of his rounds, Ted found a good blaze going in a bad spot where the fire had followed a root underground to a point several feet from the firebreak. It had burned over a rod square when he got to it; he let out a yell and I went to him. He was working furiously and had the blaze subdued when I got there. If the fire had been left without patrol, it would have been going again, with this start, as bad as before.

By noon we were mighty tired and hungry. What made it worse was that we couldn't help thinking of all that exquisite surplus of food there had been at the picnic dinner which we had left just twenty-four hours before. But soon we were to get relief, and I don't mean W. P. A.

We patrolled the fire line horseback, from noon on, because

we were played out and there was little to be done now except wait for all smoke to die down. The clouds thickened and we watched them hopefully. By three o'clock it began to thunder, then to sprinkle, and in a few moments we were in a regular downpour. We had slickers on the saddles, but we let ourselves get wet just because it felt good to our grimy bodies at first. Then it set in to hail and we had to get our slickers on and rush to a big juniper for protection. It hailed and rained for an hour, and we welcomed it, for it really stopped that fire from any chance of spreading. This was the beginning of the summer rains, and for three months there was no more fire danger.

While we were so pleased with the rain and hail, which helped us finish the job, I recalled a day in April when a shower and a sleet-and-snow flurry had completely wrecked my chance of getting a lion that day.

We had got thoroughly soaked and now, with the hail, it was cold, and we shivered until our teeth chattered. It was the fifth day of July. We gathered the tools together and cached them to be picked up later, and rode back to headquarters. Mr. Talle had seen the general rain and correctly decided there was no need to send us help. One of the boys took me in a pick-up on up to Castle Rock, and it was nine o'clock at night when we got there.

I had been on the go, without sleep, for forty hours, and eighteen of them had been put in fighting fire. I was convinced, as I had concluded many times before, that fighting a forest fire is just about the hardest job a man can do.

Chapter 11

We Rope a Bear

AS HAS BEEN MENTIONED BEFORE, I HAD SEVEN SADDLE HORSES TO RIDE during the summer months, a fresh horse for each day of the week. Five of these were Vermejo Club horses and two were my own, the only two I had kept when I left my ranch. These were Dixie and Brownie, saddle mares which I had broken and trained myself, and both were in the prime of their usefulness at that time.

Dixie was a big coal-black mare, with a strip of white in her face, one white hind foot, and a small, pretty head. She was unusually stout, with as good staying qualities and as sure-footed a mountain saddle animal as I have ever ridden. In brush and rough country, and in climbing over trailless, steep, and rocky slopes, following a pack of dogs, you couldn't beat her. She had become used to hunting and would pep up a lot when the dogs hit a hot trail, sharing their eagerness.

One could leave her anywhere, any time, by just dropping the bridle reins, and she would stay right there indefinitely. One cold, winter day I left her about noon on a bleak, snowy ridge and did not get back to her until afternoon the next day; but there she was, waiting for me, not fifty feet from where I had left her. She would graze a little if grass were available, but always backed around so as to avoid stepping on the bridle reins.

Brownie was a solid-chestnut-colored mare, of a different build, and a different type of animal. She was a real gaited saddle mare, but excellent in the mountainous and rough country also. I had taught her to do just about anything one ever needs a horse to do on practical ranch and hunting work.

I had bought Brownie when she was four years old for $25—the best bargain I ever made. I later sold her to a member of the Vermejo Club for ten times that amount. When I bought her, she was unbroke, high-spirited, and well-made and had lots of action, as nice an all-around prospect for a really good saddle animal as one would want. I turned the filly over to a cowboy who was working for me, to break. Al was a good rider and didn't care much how hard a horse bucked; in fact, he liked it. But I wanted Brownie gentled rather than broke; so I said, "Al, don't ever let Brownie buck. Just gentle her and don't let her get the idea of bucking into her head."

Al said, "I'll ride the idea out of her."

"No," I said, "I don't want you to do that. Don't let her get in the habit of bucking!" Al started to protest further when Max, a native I had working for me, and himself a better hand with horses than he was with the English language, said, "No, Señor Al, Meestar Barker ees right. You lets her do it once or two, and she weel wants to do eet ever since."

But Al, who was staying at an outlying camp, let her buck and didn't make much headway stopping her. In fact, she got worse every time he rode her. Then Al got hurt riding (or rather, being thrown from a bronco at a rodeo), and couldn't ride for a while. One day my wife and I went to his camp and I caught up Brownie, to try my hand at gentling her.

Al said, "She will kill you; you just don't know how hard she can buck." But I took her anyway and put a pack saddle on her and a light pack—just our camp bedroll. I took plenty of time and got her a bit used to the pack before we started out, and she didn't buck at all. Then my suspicions were confirmed that perhaps Al's spurs had had more to do with her bucking than anything else. We were looking after cattle from a camp farther back in the mountains, and packed her two or three days, leading her everywhere we went.

On the way home the third day, my wife remarked, "Brownie is just too pretty and nice to be carrying a pack."

I said, "O. K., then, I'll just change saddles and ride her on in." And that is what I did, and got by without a sign of bucking. I petted her a lot and rode her every day for a while, and she gentled down as nice as could be, and proved the easiest saddle animal to teach to do what I wanted that I have ever had.

She developed into an excellent "cutting horse," and a dandy roping horse, holding the roped animal as nicely as one would want, never giving an inch after the rider left the saddle. She was not afraid of a rope when she got a foot over it, and could stop and turn on a dime. Remarkably enough, she was a rare exception in not being afraid of a bear or lion, dead or alive. One could pack a bear or lion on her as easily as a bedroll.

It was that very exceptional trait, and her dependability

as a rope horse, that made it possible for me to rope and tie up a bear while riding her one day at Vermejo Park.

Not long after the forest fire on the Fourth of July, a publicity agent was sent out by Mr. Chandler to get some good news stories about the game and predators, and the hunting and fishing resources on the Vermejo Park. The newspaperman (whose name I do not now recall), of course, got a lot of information from Mr. Talle and others. But it was up to me to give him some thrillers about lions and bears and twelve-hundred-pound elk (that actually weighed about six or seven hundred pounds). He was much interested in my lion hunts and how the lions had been killing so many deer. He wrote up quite a humorous column on lion scatology from information I gave him.

He thought it would be fine if I could get a lion while he was there for him to ship back to Los Angeles to display in connection with his news stories about the Vermejo Club, in which about a hundred persons held memberships that had cost them five thousand dollars each.

So I set out to try to get a lion for him in the three remaining days that he was to be there. It was raining every day and the chances of getting a track were not at all good, but I told him I would try my best. I hoped I might find the Old Lady and her young ones. I wanted him to ride with me, but that did not appeal to him; so I went alone.

I found no lions, but the second day we did find a bear. (Remember WE means my dogs, my horse, and me.) It was on the timbered slope east of the Wall, between Leandro and Bernal Creeks. While cutting for lion sign we rode right onto a medium-sized brown bear, among some boulders, where it had evidently bedded down for the day. We were so close when he "woof-woofed" and tore out down the hill, that the dogs broke discipline and put in after him as tight as they

could go, making the hills echo with their enthusiastic barking, while Brownie and I waited to see what would happen

It certainly was a pretty race down through the pines. Puse was too fast for Mr. Bear, and within a hundred yards was snapping at his flanks. In another hundred, the frightened bear couldn't take it any longer and climbed a big pine tree.

I rode on down, intending to call the dogs away and go on about my business and let Bruin go on about his. When I got there, the bear was trying to come down the tree to make another run for it, but Pup and Puse were making it a little too hot for him. Kate was doing less fighting but a mighty lot of baying, as if to encourage Pup and Puse to keep him up at all costs.

The bear, which I judge would weigh a hundred and seventy-five to two hundred pounds, would back down the tree to within four or five feet of the ground; then Pup or Puse, or both of them, would grab him by the seat of his pants, and up the tree he would scramble again. Sometimes Puse would hang on until he was eight or ten feet off the ground and then turn loose.

We were not permitted to kill a bear at all on Vermejo Park at that time, unless he was a stock-killer. No one would want to kill one in midsummer anyway. So I couldn't substitute this bear for the lion that I was supposed to get for publicity purposes; or could I?

It was then that a foolish thought occurred to me and I promptly acted upon it. We were not over a quarter of a mile from a point which could be reached by truck. Why not rope the bear, tie him up, and go to Bernal Cabin a couple of miles away, 'phone for a truck and men to help me pack the live bear down the hill, load him in the truck—and give the press agent a real story? I had visions of the big headline: "Hunter Ropes and Ties Up Bear, Single-Handed."

It sounded all right at the time, and no doubt the thought occurred to me that someone besides the Vermejo Club would get some publicity. All the same, I decided to rope and tie up a bear.

Within about eight feet of the tree the bear was in, there was a large pine snag about twelve feet high, the result of a tree's having, many years previously, been broken off by the wind. There was a single large limb growing out of this snag near its top which had continued to grow after the tree had been broken off; and, as if to attempt to replace the main trunk, it had turned upward and grown quite thick. Thus it formed a perfect scaffold from which to raise and lower the bear as needed, to get him properly tied.

I had to maneuver Mr. Bear into the right position so that if (or when) I roped him, I could jerk him off his tree, and the rope would fall across this heavy limb. The first time he got into the right position, I swung and threw my saddle rope from on Brownie, but the loop missed. He then went higher than before and it was a little while before he backed down again; but when he did, I was ready. This time, I edged in a little closer, and when he was at a point directly beyond the big limb from where I was, I again tossed my loop and made a perfect catch.

As the loop tightened on his neck, he started back up the tree in a hurry. At the same instant I turned Brownie, and with the rope's end looped solidly over the saddle horn, started her quickly straight away from the tree. When the slack went out of the rope, the bear was jerked off the side of the tree and fell to the ground, but for an instant only.

The rope had fallen as I had wished, right across that big limb, and Brownie quickly pulled him up, free of the ground, where he hung helplessly, and, of course, his wind was partially shut off by the tight loop around his neck.

I had no other ropes with me, but had cut some strings off my saddle, removed the two rifle scabbard straps, then taken off one bridle rein and my own leather belt, which I hoped would be enough to tie him up with.

As quickly as possible after the bear was pulled up off the ground, I turned Brownie around, head toward the bear, leaped from the saddle, and rushed in to start tying him up. My first job was to tie his hind feet together very tightly so that there was no chance for them to come loose. This I accomplished with one of the scabbard straps and my belt.

I had some difficulty with Pup and Puse because they wanted to fight him and under the circumstances were hard to control. I had no time to waste and had to get a good-sized stick to make them understand they were to leave the bear alone.

Once the hind feet were tied, I rushed back to Brownie, who stood perfectly still but alert, ears forward and feet braced to hold the weight of the bear, and led her toward him until the rope slackened enough to let him lie flat on the ground.

His breath had been pretty well cut off, and I had to let him recover it before proceeding further. He lay still only a couple of seconds and then got up on his front feet, popped his teeth at the dogs, and, with his hind feet tied securely together, tried first to get away and then to fight me or the dogs. To my surprise, he did not try to bite the rope in two. Of course, I did not let him scramble around much. I presume it was only a few seconds. Then I backed Brownie up until we again had Mr. Bruin hanging free, and I rushed in to tie his front feet together.

This was somewhat harder than tying the hind feet, but finally I got him tied securely. I let him down, as before, to get his breath, and again he recovered very quickly and began trying to bite the straps off his front feet; so I had Brownie

pull him up again. This time my job was to pull his hind feet and front feet together and tie them there in a bunch so that he would be entirely helpless as far as his feet and legs were concerned. It was quite a job but at last I got it done and hastened to let him down.

He lay still for a moment and I loosened the rope around his neck so that he could breathe freely. He was getting pretty hot, I could see, but no hotter than I, for the sweat was rolling off me from my extraordinary exertion and haste in trying to get through with the job before the bear should become overheated.

He came around all right again in just a few seconds, but took it easy for a little while before he started fighting his bonds again. My next job, and the last one, was to put a muzzle on him so that he could not bite the straps that bound his feet. That would have been fairly easy if I had only had another rope, but I did not and I was out of straps. I still had the saddle strings that I had cut off, but they were not long enough or stout enough. Still, I thought I could tie his mouth shut by wrapping the strings tightly around his snout several times and then using a part of my saddle rope to finish the muzzle, or make a kind of hackamore.

So we pulled him up again, this time not entirely clear of the ground but so that his buttocks rested on the ground. I tried to tie his mouth shut, but he in turn snapped so quickly and viciously that once he almost got my hand. Then I had to give it up and let him back down to the ground to get his breath again. I didn't want him to pass out on me; that just wouldn't do; so I had to be careful.

Many times in breaking wild horses, it is necessary to rope them and let them choke themselves down, in order to get a hackamore on them. I have done and seen that done many

times, and have never seen a bronco choked to death that way. They always came around all right when the loop around the neck was loosened.

I didn't see why this wouldn't work on a bear, too; so I tried it. Brownie pulled him up again, and I waited until he quit snapping, then quickly tied his mouth shut by wrapping the saddle string tightly around his nose and tying it there securely. I quickly let him down and brought Brownie in close, so that I would have plenty of slack rope to finish the job.

He lay still, as I expected, and I at once loosened the loop around his neck and proceeded to finish the muzzle by tying the rope on his neck so it would not draw tight again and choke him. Then with half-hitches around his nose, I had him fixed just right. By golly, I had done it! Now to lope over to Bernal Cabin to 'phone for a truck and some help to carry him down the hill; and the press agent would have his story.

But I never got to do that. Mr. Bear had not moved while I was putting the finishing touches on. And when I was finished, I saw he was not noticeably breathing. I set in at once to give him artificial respiration, and I worked on him like the devil, but to no avail. I even fanned him with my hat and cut the strings from around his nose; I did everything I could think of to revive him, but he just wouldn't start breathing again. At last I had to give it up. He was dead.

My headline news had blown up in my face. What should I do about it?

"Damn it all!" I said remorsefully. "Why did I try it, anyway?"

It was not a violation of the game laws because, under the Class A Park Permit then in effect there, the Vermejo Club had the legal right to kill any game, at any time, and in any quantity desired. (That law has since been changed.) It was,

however, against the Club rules to kill a bear unless he were a stock-killer, and I had unintentionally killed a bear which I had no reason to believe fell into that class.

I couldn't bring him back to life now; so I decided the thing to do was to go right in and tell Mr. Talle, the Club manager, just what had happened. I did just that as soon as I could ride down to headquarters. Mr. Talle thought the incident was rather amusing and less serious than I. We both agreed, however, that it wasn't the sort of stunt to tell the press agent about. So he said that would be our secret; and for many years it was.

This incident is not one that I am at all proud of, for that's not the right way to treat a bear. I relate the incident here because I set out to tell the story of what happened during my year at Vermejo Park, and to omit those happenings that fail to reflect credit to myself wouldn't quite be the sporting thing to do.

Chapter 12

A Poacher Pays Off

COWBOY HUMOR IS ALMOST TRADITIONAL AND ITS SPONTANEITY IS REFRESHING. ITS effectiveness is often enhanced by, and largely dependent upon, the vernacular of the range. Cowboy wit often serves to break up what otherwise might develop into serious situations. It contributes to the morale of any cow outfit. At Castle Rock one morning, a cowboy's quick wit saved a fist fight, and neither party had to sacrifice his principles by giving in to the other.

One of the farm hands had a rather ill-mannered mongrel dog, which he thought a lot of and which followed him everywhere he went. The farmer and I were sitting on the edge of the porch one day when a cowboy rode up. He was a new hand on the ranch and didn't know either the farmer or his dog.

The cowboy got off his horse and started toward us. The dog rushed out at him, barking and growling viciously. The

cowboy was obviously afraid of the dog and backed off a little. The dog subsided somewhat when his master called him, but he didn't come back. Instead, with bristles up, and growling and snorting, the dog went on up to the cowboy and sniffed at his chaps in a manner which raised some suspicions in the cowboy's mind as to the dog's intentions. The cowboy, acting on impulse, kicked the animal vigorously in the ribs, sending him howling back to the house.

Instantly the dog's master came off the porch, fighting mad, and shouted, "What the hell's the matter with you? Sport wouldn't bite you."

"I wasn't scared of him biting me," drawled the cowboy, "but when he came up and smelled my chaps and then turned around and raised his hind foot, I shore thought he was agoin' to kick me."

That broke the tension, everybody laughed, and the fighting mood vanished.

The cowboy had dropped by to tell me that Mr. Talle wanted me to go over to Merrick Lake and help shoe the horses of the prairie dog poisoning crew. I did not fancy the job but thought, of course, that Homer Pickens and his crew of seven or eight boys would be there to help and it wouldn't take long. I have remarked that fighting a forest fire is the hardest work a man can do. Next to that, shoeing horses is my idea of the hardest, back-breakingest job I know of. Shoeing one or two saddle horses occasionally is not bad; but to work all day at it, especially if the horses are not right gentle to shoe, will make an old man out of one.

At the Lake I found there were eighteen head of horses in the corral to be shod. Mr. Pickens had very judiciously selected this date for the horse-shoeing job, as he had to go to Raton that very afternoon to take a Civil Service examination the next day. His crew were just youngsters—eighteen

or twenty years old—and I think only one of them had ever shod a horse before. So there were eighteen horses, most of which I would have to shoe myself in a day and a half's time. Some job!

Since Mr. Pickens has worked for me during the past fifteen years, I have had many opportunities to get even with him; and don't think I haven't done it.

We got started shoeing horses at one in the afternoon. I showed the boys how, as best I could, and of necessity turned over to them the gentler ponies. By dark I had finished with five, while Lee Irwin had shod one, and the other boys, all together two more That left ten of the worst ones for the next day.

I drove back to Castle Rock for the night, returning the next morning with a pretty stiff back. We set right to work and by six o'clock that evening we had finished, in spite of the fact that we had to throw and tie down several of the horses in order to shoe them. We had no more than finished when Homer Pickens drove up, very much pleased, *he* said, because he thought he had passed the examination.

I had other ideas as to the reason for his smiling countenance.

Later on, I visited the prairie dog control crew while it was camped at La Cuerva cow camp, on the Costilla, below the Lake. They were working down around the mouth of Latir Creek, where there was a great concentration of prairie dogs. The rodents had just about wrecked the country; there was a hole every few feet. These are the white-tailed dogs which dig their holes all over the landscape and are not confined to colonies or towns, as is the case with their black-tailed brothers, whose habitat is in the lower elevations. Another difference is in the manner in which the holes are protected.

The black-tailed dogs, dwellers of the lowlands in a much

warmer part of the state, protect their subterranean homes by building and maintaining a well-formed, cone-shaped mound, several inches high, around their holes. The white-tailed dogs, on the other hand, do not go to the trouble to protect their homes in this manner. The dirt from the main excavation is thrown out mainly on the lower side, but there are many holes used by them where there is no dirt pile at all. Apparently these are holes connected with the main burrows, and the dogs dig up to the surface from below, pushing the dirt out through the main entrances as their excavation progresses.

Prairie dogs are one of the most destructive of rodents, and their liquidation greatly increases the carrying capacity of a range for livestock, and eliminates one cause of erosion. Coyotes, bobcats, hawks, and badgers are their principal natural enemies.

The nature-balance theory is correct if it assumes that predators annually harvest only the surplus prairie dogs, leaving the maximum number of breeding animals that the range will support. But it is poor range economy to maintain a saturated population of destructive and injurious rodents when the products of the soil, which they destroy, could be utilized by domestic livestock or game. Hence, through a systematic poisoning program, these heavy populations of prairie dogs are eliminated.

That evening when I returned to La Cuerva camp, the boys told me that a man and a woman had just gone up the road in a car, and that they didn't belong on the place. We suspected they were poachers. No fishing or hunting at all was permitted on the property without a permit from the Club, and it was part of my job to see that this rule was respected. It was too late to investigate then; so I waited until the next morning, when Mr. Pickens rode up that way with me.

We rode up toward Costilla Lake, keeping a watchout for

fishermen along the stream, as we had checked the road and found that the car had not gone back out. Mr. Pickens was riding a fractious little black horse named Snip. My dogs were following me, as usual, and I had told them to stay behind us, so as not to warn the poachers of our approach.

Kate, my red hound, got too close to Snip's heels and touched his hind legs. Quicker than it can be told, Snip dropped his head and started pitching. He made about three high, vicious jumps and unloaded his rider.

Mr. Pickens, caught entirely by surprise and unprepared, didn't have a chance, and fell on his shoulders in the middle of the road. That was the luckiest fall I have ever seen a man take. The road was not graded at all; it was merely two ruts worn by wagon and car wheels over the rocky edge of the valley. All over the area, both in the road and out of it, the ground was strewn with jagged quartzite rocks from the size of a man's head to the size of a three-gallon water bucket. That is, all but one place—a perfectly smooth spot about four feet across, in the middle of the road where Pickens landed. Fortunately, he was uninjured; but had he landed anywhere else within a hundred feet, it would have had to be on a sharp rock. Coincidence? Or was it an unseen hand looking out for him?

We caught the horse, he remounted, and soon he and his crew began putting out poison grain for prairie dogs, while I rode on up to a parked car which we could see up the road a way.

Sure enough, as we had anticipated, a man and a woman were fishing and had half a sackful of trout. As I rode up, I recognized the man (whom we shall call Jack Smith) as one with whom the Game Department had previously had trouble. Some fifteen years before, I had helped to put him in jail for general disturbance. He was supposed to be just a bit tough, especially when it came to game wardens. He

didn't recognize me, and when approached, pretended that he did not know that it was illegal to fish there.

They had more than the bag limit of trout, had no state license, and were also violating the law by fishing on the Park without the owners' consent. Smith pretended to be new to the country and that he had no idea he was doing anything wrong and begged to be excused just this one time. His attitude was typical of that of the majority of game law violators whom I have prosecuted during twenty years as an unpaid deputy game warden and fifteen years as State Game Warden.

I let him talk for quite a while and just sat there on my horse and watched him closely, for he had once taken a gun away from a cowboy on this very ranch, under similar circumstances. When he had about run down and it was my turn to talk, I said, "Jack, what the heck's the use of your trying out that kind of talk? I know you and know that you are better acquainted with this country than I am." He was set back a notch by my statement, particularly by the fact that I knew him.

"Who the hell are you, anyway?" he asked.

"You ought to know, Jack. I helped to put you in jail one night when I was a forest ranger," I replied. He looked me over for a full minute, and then he remembered me and said, "Well, if it ain't Elliott Barker; how are you, anyway?" He held out his hand to shake, but I declined, saying: "Not until this case is over." I could not afford to risk his attempting to play a trick.

"Well, what are you going to do with me? I'm broke," he said.

"We will go to a justice of the peace at Amalia, and I'll file a complaint, and you will pay a fine—maybe fifty dollars if you behave yourself, but more if you try any of your tricks."

"How you going down—horseback?" he asked; for it was

twenty miles to Amalia, the nearest settlement, and a justice of the peace.

I said, "No, I'll go up the road about three miles and get a car. Meanwhile you and your wife go on down and hunt up a justice of the peace and have him at his office by the time I get down there. How about it?"

He looked at me with a kind of funny expression and asked, "Why would you trust me to do that?"

"I'll trust you to do just that," I said, "if you will look me in the eye and say you will do it; otherwise I'll have to ride herd on you until we get there."

After a moment he said, "That's the first damn time any officer ever trusted me, and I'll be there waiting, sure as hell."

And he was, and he paid a fifty-dollar fine, and then we shook hands. But that didn't break him of game law violations. He has paid off more heavily on more serious charges outside the Park since then.

The next day I went on up to the bungalow and did some more work on the ditch that the beavers wouldn't leave open before. They again closed the canal as soon as I left.

Some of the Club members were now at the Park, and I ran across a fishing party who were not having much luck. I gave them some pointers and a few demonstrations, which helped them only a little, for it takes a lot of practice to become good trout fisherman, especially a fly fisherman. I stayed at the bungalow with them that night, for they wanted to see some game, and I thought I could show them some the next morning.

I got them up before daylight, made coffee, and just as it began to get light in the east we left the bungalow afoot and walked to a series of grassy parks in the aspen forest, where I hoped to find some elk feeding. We were fortunate, for just as the sun came up we discovered a little band of elk not over a hundred yards away. They had not seen us, as we were

just peeking over a little ridge and had the sun to our backs. We kept still and watched them.

There were three sleek, buff-colored, black-necked cows and two small, spotted calves, and a two-year-old bull whose horns, still in the velvet, were perhaps half grown. The elk were feeding quietly, but were already headed for the timber, where they would bed down during the day. The guests, three men and two women, had never seen an elk outside of a zoo before and excitedly watched the animals graze for a few moments. Then the elk moved leisurely on into the dense aspen forest, their yellowish-white rump patches still visible long after their bodies had blended in with the forest cover.

On the way back to the bungalow, a gray, bushy-tailed coyote trotted out into the open, and when he saw us, turned and ran back into the timber. These folks were delighted with their good luck and promised to come back again later in the fall to go elk hunting, but they never did.

On the way back to Castle Rock, I ran into Mr. Talle, who had brought a crew of men up to Leandro Creek to repair the flumes and canal that convey the water from the creek for about three miles to Adams and Bartlett Lakes. Those lakes are quite large natural basins on top of a mesa or table land, and when kept full, form excellent lakes for fishing and boating. In fact, a large, fine yacht, relic of the affluent days in the Bartlett era, lies decaying on the beach.

Mr. Talle wanted me to look after this job; so I was stuck for a couple of weeks, during which time I had no opportunity to get out after lions again. I was very anxious to have a real try at the Old Lady and her brood, but first one thing, then another, interfered; and again we had to postpone our date with them.

By the first of August, the oat field was well along toward

heading, and deer were already coming into it every night but doing no especial damage. It was about that time that a lone elk, or a small band of three or four head, began coming in once in a while. All the cowboys said that the number would soon increase, which I found to be the case.

There was an arrangement between the owners of the Vermejo Park and the local manager and operator of the cattle outfit, that a certain number of elk could be used by the cattlemen for meat in connection with the operation of the ranch.

One cow elk had been killed for meat by the cow outfit shortly after I went up there in April, but none after that until late in August, for during that period, although game could legally be killed at any time, the animals were not in prime condition. No sport hunting had taken place up to the middle of August, for the elk and deer antlers had not fully developed.

By the middle of August, I began seeing fresh signs where bull elk had been rubbing their antlers to polish them up, indicating that the antlers of some bulls, at least, were maturing. As the new antler grows, it is covered with a brown, hairy skin known as "velvet." Unlike a cow's horn, which has a live core and the blood circulation inside, a deer and elk antler is solid all the way through and has no inside circulation and, of course, none outside except while the antler is growing. At that time, beneath the velvet skin, there is a network of blood vessels forming a circulatory system for depositing calcium and phosphorus in the building of the new antler.

When the growth is complete, the blood circulation stops and the velvet dries up. It is then that the bulls begin horning young trees and bushes to clean that dead skin off and polish their antlers for display and combat purposes during the rapidly approaching mating season. Sometimes I would find

long strips of yellowish-brown velvet hanging on a sapling that the bull had used. Sometimes, saplings three inches in diameter would be broken off six or seven feet from the ground, where the bull had too vigorously horned it, perhaps in mock combat while attacking an imaginary adversary. In other places I would find a young spruce or aspen stripped of its branches and much of its bark, from antler polishing.

All these signs denoted that the antlers were mature and ready for use in battle during the mating season, the primary purpose for which they had been provided by nature. Likewise, it was the signal that trophies were prime for pursuit by sportsmen.

Chapter 13

Bugle Call to Action

BY THE FIRST OF SEPTEMBER BULL ELK WERE BUGLING ALL OVER the place. It was mating season. The bulls, now crowned with brand-new, magnificent, and formidable weapons, were prepared to fight to the death for the right to participate in the biological function necessary for the perpetuation of the species. There had been a seasonal movement of the elk on their range, and they were now congregated in bands of considerable size, using the lower open valleys both east and west of the divide, their bugle calls echoing through the hills.

The bugle is a mating call and at the same time a challenge to any other bull who may desire and have the temerity to contest in battle for supremacy. The bugle call starts low but with bell-like clearness, and waveringly rises to higher notes and increases in volume for fifteen or twenty seconds, ending with two or three explosive, hoarse grunts. While I heard lots of bugling and saw plenty of evidence of vicious fighting,

it was not my privilege to observe a contest between two of these grand, majestic beasts.

The calves were by now big, husky fellows who had made a phenomenal growth in the three and a half months of their lives and had already lost the spots which serve at first as a protective color pattern. The calves, soon to be weaned, would stay with their mothers through the winter, better to learn from them the art of self-preservation.

The big black-necked, gray-bodied, antlered bulls were lordly animals. It is astounding how such massive antlers can be grown in the short space of five months. Truly the annual shedding and regrowth of antlers by the family *Cervidae* is one of nature's most spectacular phenomena.

The mature bulls have six or seven tines on each antler, tips sharp and polished almost ivory white, while the stout main beam, harder than bone, remains a deep brown color. The yearling bulls have only a pair of spikes from ten to twenty inches long, sometimes remaining in the velvet far into the winter. The antlers of the mature young bulls are long, slender, and symmetrical except where broken in fighting. The old bulls have more massive antlers with heavy, thick beams, and frequently a tendency to be palmated.

The thickness of the beam at its base, rather than the number of tines, is indicative of the age of the animal. The antler beam, as with deer, becomes thicker each year but not necessarily longer, while the number of points remains normally at six or seven on each antler of mature bulls. The very old, decadent bulls are apt to have very heavy but shorter antlers with short, blunt points and a definite tendency toward being palmated.

While I did not have the opportunity to observe a fight between two bulls, I came very near having a fight *with* one. I was riding through a thick stand of young spruce, fir, and

aspen one day on the C S Ranch where a few years previously there had been a timber-cutting operation. Logging trails six to eight feet wide had been swamped out at intervals to skid out the saw logs and railroad ties. These trails or skidways extended only as far back as timber had been cut, thus often ending abruptly in the heart of a thicket of young timber.

As I fought my way on horseback through one of these thickets, I came out into an old skidway; and to my surprise, not fifty steps up the slope in the skidway, stood a very fine, extra-large bull elk. His white-tipped antlers were beautifully formed, long, symmetrical, and unusually wide spread. I wished for my camera, which I often carried but which I had failed to bring that day, for he was well within picture-taking range and posed majestically for me. Well, just for the hell of it, I thought I would ride up and see how close I could get to him. When I started toward him he turned up the skidway; touching spurs to my horse, I gave chase. We gained a little in the first hundred yards, and then the skidway ended abruptly right in a dense thicket.

The huge bull stopped and turned to face me, but I rode on, thinking he would leave the skidway and go crashing away through the timber. He evidently knew his limitations and decided that his wide-spreading rack could not be carried through that dense thicket. The only other way out was back past me and my horse. When I was within thirty yards of him, he started toward me with head lowered, the shaggy black hair on his neck and withers turned the wrong way, and his mouth open.

The beautiful, magnificent creature I had a moment before been admiring had instantly turned into a most terrifying beast, charging me viciously. Neither my horse nor I had any stomach to meet the charging animal's dozen bayonets. Whirling quickly, as a good cow horse can, we turned tail and beat it

back down the skidway a few jumps, then ducked into the thicket, where I now realized Mr. Elk could not follow.

He had not wanted to fight, but when we cornered him, he decided he would come out of the tight place even if he had to run over us. He passed where we had turned off, in a long trot; then I turned and rode out again. My fine bull, yellow rump bobbing up and down, was leisurely trotting on down the trail, head now held high, nose straight out, antlers laid back even with his sides, and the neck-hair back in normal position.

Only a few days after that my son Roy was visiting me, and we went one day back into the aspen area at the head of Rock Creek and came upon a band of elk bedded down at the edge of a thicket. We had left our horses down the slope and were approaching very quietly afoot. The elk were asleep and did not note our presence until we were quite close to them. There were several cows, calves, and yearlings, and one large bull.

Of a sudden they sensed our presence and jumped to their feet, to stare unbelievingly for an instant. Then they made off into the thicket with a great crashing of brush. But the old bull couldn't make it; he started to follow the cows, got his antlers tangled in the brush, and turned and came back. We had approached from the only side where the timber was open enough for his antlers. Straight for us he came, all bristled up, neck bowed, and chewing menacingly. We stepped to one side, lively enough, for a few yards, and he rushed on past and disappeared in the aspens, nose high and horns back, just as the big bull had done a few days before.

It was that same day that I had to put away a well-beloved rifle that I had used for twenty-two years. Mr. Talle had asked me to kill a young cow elk for meat, as they were now fat and in prime condition. We found just the animal we

wanted, a two-year-old heifer, within good, close range, less than a hundred yards away. I took careful aim for a heart shot and fired, without any doubt that I would make a clean kill.

To my astonishment, and much to the amusement of my son, the bullet kicked up dirt six feet to one side of the elk. I looked at the sights to see if by chance one of them had got knocked out of place, but they were all right. As if having no fear of that kind of shooting, the elk remained right where she stood. I have always prided myself on being a fairly good rifle shot, and I couldn't understand missing such a chance. I took deliberate, careful aim and shot again. That time the bullet hit the ground right at the elk's feet, put her to flight, but did no other damage. Much chagrined, and the butt of considerable kidding from the boy, I went on back without the elk I had been sent after.

At Castle Rock, Roy put up a target three feet square, with a ten-inch bull's-eye only twenty-five yards away, for me to practice on. I shot at it once and hit it—way down at five o'clock. But that shot told the story. The bullet had hit sideways instead of straight. The rifle at last had worn out and the bullets were slipping past the rifling rather than following it, and hence just going any which way after they left the muzzle.

I had bought that rifle, a thirty-two Winchester Special 1894 model, in 1908, and had used it for twenty-two years. It had a twenty-six-inch, half-octagon, half-round barrel, half magazine, and lever action. It had been wonderfully accurate, and with it through the years I had killed a great deal of game and many predators, from grouse to grizzlies. My work and my hunting had nearly always been horseback, and I had worn out half a dozen saddle scabbards carrying the rifle.

That rifle now hangs prominently on a rack in my dining

room, half the hardwood forearm worn away and one corner of the hard steel, octagonal part of the barrel rubbed by stirrup leather until it is round, in mute testimony to the number of long miles it was my cherished companion.

I bought another thirty-two Winchester Special, as nearly like the old one as I could get, and still use it.

With the movement and congregation of elk coincidental with the mating season, we began to suffer some damage to the oat crop at Castle Rock. At first there were just a few head that came into the fields at night to feed. Then there were a dozen in a bunch, and soon as many as forty or fifty. That many began to destroy, by trampling, in addition to what they ate, enough of the crops to require action. Not only did they damage the crops themselves, but they damaged the fences so that cattle began to get into the fields also.

One day one of the cowboys and I tightened the wires of the fence, spliced those that were broken, and stapled the wires solidly to the posts, putting the fence in good condition. The next morning I rode out at daybreak to see if the elk had come in again.

A band of thirty or forty which had been in the field were grouped up along the fence ready to go out at their accustomed place. When an elk jumps a fence, he usually hits the top wire, loosening it and jerking out a staple or two, thus lowering the wire several inches. The next one jumping the fence at the same place will hit the lowered wire, and lower it a little more, until at last the sagging wires are but a couple of feet high. But this band was taking its time and using a different and unique method of lowering the wires, a method whereby they would not have to exert themselves by jumping the newly repaired fence while their bellies were full of green oats.

They had not seen me; so I stopped my horse behind a big boulder and got off to watch them for a few moments. There

was a large old cow apparently in charge of operations, with four or five others helping, while the younger animals and bulls waited patiently behind them. The cows would line up with their heads over the fence, as if they were going to jump, but instead of doing so would slowly lean and step forward, pushing against the wires with their necks. By all pushing at once, they exerted considerable pressure and "ping" would go a staple here and another there, until the wire was well loosened. They would back away and mill around a little bit, and then, as if by signal from their leader, would again line up and go through the same procedure.

Each time a few more staples would be pulled out and the wires would be loosened a little more and sag closer to the ground. After several assaults against the fence during the course of about ten minutes, the top wires, for two or three spans, were hanging loosely, not over two and a half feet from the ground. The old cow then led out by hopping over the low hurdle, the others followed, stepping and hopping over the wires, but always bumping their feet on the top one as if to loosen it more.

I shot a young cow out of the herd for meat for the cattle outfit, hoping that would also help to keep them scared away for a while.

There were some guests and Club members at the Park at that time, and Mr. Talle sent two of them up for me to take out elk hunting. We hunted one day back in the forests but failed to find a suitable bull. The next morning we went out at daybreak to the spot where the elk had loosened the fence wires a few days before. There were elk in the field; so we waited, well concealed behind some boulders, but they failed to come out that way. Instead they went up the draw above the field and jumped the fence at another place, far out of rifle range.

There was a nice big bull in the bunch; so we maneuvered around the hillside to intercept them. We stalked them nicely, and as they were traveling quite slowly, we got within a hundred yards or less of them. They were strung out in single file with the big bull in the rear. As he walked through a little glade directly opposite us, I gave the signal for one of the hunters to fire. I told him to hold low, close to the shoulder, and take careful aim for a heart shot with his .30-06. In spite of my coaching and the immense size of the target, a clean miss was scored.

The bull stopped still, broadside, to look to see where the shot came from. Both hunters then began firing, and the bull trotted on into the timber, untouched by any of the seven bullets that had been sent his way.

That is one of the most trying situations that a hunter's guide has to contend with—the failure of the hunter to cash in on the opportunity which the guide has worked hard to provide. The guide must do his best to get the hunter into position for a good shot. Sometimes that means hours, sometimes it means days of hard, nerve-straining work. At last he has done all he can; there the game is. The zero hour has arrived and there is nothing more that he can legitimately do. The opportunity has finally come for the hunter to meet his obligation. And then—the hunter misses, and the game is gone.

The guide must be cheerful about it. He must not lose his temper and say, as he often feels like doing, "What the hell's the use?" No, no! That wouldn't do. He must say, "Oh, well, don't worry. We'll get another chance; just you wait and you'll get him next time."

With those encouraging words, he must set out anew to work diligently for hours or days to provide another opportunity. No wonder some guides are tempted to kill the game for their employers!

Of course, some sportsmen don't miss, but that kind doesn't usually need a guide either. Why more hunters don't learn to know their guns and learn how to shoot them accurately before they go afield in quest of game has always been a mystery to me. Far too many shoot a rifle but once a year and then wait until they get a shot at game before trying *themselves* and the *gun* out to see how they both shoot.

The next day one of my hunters did get another chance and that time got his bull after firing half a dozen shots. The other settled for a cow on the last day he was out.

During September we had several hunters out, some of whom I guided and some of whom the cowboys took out, while others were sent out with Walt Smiley, the chef at headquarters. Walt was a good cook, whether it was with the chuck wagon or at headquarters when the Club was open. He was a good cowboy and a good hunter, trapper, and guide—rather a unique combination.

We started harvesting the oat crop late in September, and Mr. Talle asked me to kill a cow or a bull for meat during that period. I wanted a cow or a young bull but failed to find one in a half day's ride, and we were too busy for me to spend too much time hunting for one. It was getting late when I ran onto a very large bull. Of course, I would rather kill a bull than a cow elk any time, and so decided to take this one in spite of the fact that the meat would not be tender.

The bull was about a hundred and fifty yards distant, walking slowly at an angle away from me. I aimed for a heart shot, but placed the bullet just a trifle too far forward. It entered just back of the shoulder and angled forward, coming out right at the sticking place in the center of the lower neck. The bullet cut the jugular vein and tore a fair-sized hole where it came out. The bull spun around and I could see the blood gushing out, but he did not go down.

From the amount of blood, I was certain the shot was fatal, and did not want to spoil any meat by shooting again; so I just came up closer and waited. The great stamina of a bull elk was there demonstrated for me. The bull, head lowered and staggering a little, backed around in a circle as if to get away from the blood which was pouring out as if he had been stuck with a hunting knife. He kept this up for about a minute, getting weaker and weaker all the time, and spraddled his legs out more and more in order to stay on his feet.

There was a large Douglas fir tree right there, and in backing around he came up against the tree with his side. As if by intention, he stopped and leaned against the tree, feet braced outward and head lowered, until his nose touched the ground. There he remained, a statuesque replica of "The End of the Trail," as long as any life was left in him. At last his legs gave way and he sank to the ground, stone dead.

That was a fine old bull, with a magnificent set of ivory tusks. The antlers were very heavy, but the points were stubbed and broken off badly. The forks were palmated to the greatest extent of any elk antlers I have ever seen. I did not have the trophy mounted but saved the antlers and skull and have them in my basement today, a reminder of a noble animal who gamely died on his feet.

Chapter 14

Lost — a Horse; Found a Rope

ELK HUNTING WAS THE SPORT FEATURE WHICH WAS MOST OUTSTANDING AT the Park during the fall months, and much of my time was spent as a guide for hunter guests. Nearly all the Club members and guests of the Club, who came to the Park to hunt and fish, were fine people and good sportsmen. Some were experienced hunters and fishermen, while others were novices. The measure of a sportsman, however, is not his experience but rather his attitude toward hunting and fishing.

One man who had never hunted big game before, refused twice to take a shot at a bull elk which appeared to me to be a good chance, because he feared he could not, at that distance, make a clean kill. Finally a better shot was obtained and he made a good showing, downing his elk with two shots. The trophy was less desirable than those he had passed up, but he was very happy. He was a good sportsman.

Only one party that I had out permitted liquor to get the

better of them in the field. These two men were drinking when we started out—not as early as we should have, but about nine o'clock. One of them continued to drink, but the other sobered up and really wanted to hunt. So we found a nice, sunny place on a ridge and left our imbibing companion there with some liquor, which he wouldn't give up, and his saddle horse, telling him to stay right there and that we would return in a couple of hours. I tied his horse to a tree with a short saddle rope.

As we returned toward the spot where we had left our friend, we met him staggering dazedly along the trail, carrying a rope in his hand.

"What's the matter, Bill?" asked his friend.

"Not sure, not sure," mumbled Bill, looking at the rope.

"Not sure of what?" I asked.

"Not sure whether I lost a horsh or found a rope," he replied.

He had done both. He had untied the rope from the horse's neck before he untied it from the tree, and the horse had turned and walked away while he was untying it from the tree, and refused to let the inebriated hunter catch him. A man in that condition has no business being out in the woods with a gun. We took his gun and took him home.

The cowboys had a temporary camp on Leandro Creek just back of the Wall while working cattle in that vicinity. There was a young man, a guest of the Club, staying with them and hunting elk. He had done some deer hunting, but never had killed an elk and was not having much luck. After he had ridden and walked for a week in search of a good bull, without success, I was asked to go over and try to help him out.

We left the camp early the next morning and rode up through the spruce and aspen timber above where I had killed

my first lion on this property. In some little glades and marshy parks on this slope we found where elk had been grazing the night before. There were some big, fresh bull tracks, but it looked as if it would be a hard job to find the elk and get a shot, for I was sure they would be lying down back in the thick timber.

In one of these glades, a seep spring came out of the ground on a little, level bench land, forming a marshy place a couple of rods across. In the center of this was a basin five or six feet wide and ten or twelve feet long which the elk had pawed and trampled out to a depth of eighteen inches or more. The bottom and sides were mucky and the water in it was quite muddy. Examination showed that at least one elk had that very morning been using it as a bathtub.

I have often found these "bathtubs" or "wallows" where elk take mud baths. They do it quite frequently. Bear will do the same thing. Perhaps there is some special reason for it, but none is apparent, unless it be to keep flies from biting them or to cool themselves off. All the same, both bear and elk make and use these mud-puddle bathtubs.

We circled this glade and found that the elk had gone up the slope toward the divide, south of Leandro Creek and east of Little Costilla Peak, which forms the south boundary of the property at this point. Unless we could find the herd before it crossed over the ridge, we would have to abandon the trail, since it would be illegal for my hunter to kill an elk outside of Club property.

We left our horses, took off chaps and spurs, and followed slowly and as quietly as possible. We watched to each side as far as we could see in the timber, as we crept along, for often a bull elk will not lie down with the bunch but instead chooses a spot from fifty yards to a quarter of a mile away, then joins the band again at evening when they get up to feed.

We cared nothing for the cows, but wanted a good bull. When at last we reached the top of the ridge, we were greatly disappointed to find that the band of elk had crossed over the line. We would have to give it up and turn back. For the first time since we had started to trail the elk, I spoke above a whisper.

"Well, that's that," I said.

Instantly our attention was attracted by a movement down the ridge to our left. My hunter exclaimed, "Godamighty, look there!" as a big, fine bull elk got up out of his bed and stood broadside, head turned to look at us. He was not fifty yards away and was right on the boundary line.

"Quick, let him have it," I whispered, for a bull elk won't wait long at that close range, and a step would put this one over the line.

I did not need to say that, for before the words were out of my mouth, the hunter had leveled his gun and fired. The bull dropped in his tracks with a broken back. We rushed up close as he floundered around helplessly.

"Break his neck and put him out of his misery," I said.

The young man had now developed "buck fever" and couldn't steady himself. He fired twice at the bull's neck, at a distance of no more than five paces, but missed both times, and I had to fire the mercy shot.

That was really a fine bull, fully mature, in the prime of life, and carrying an extra-nice set of symmetrical antlers. His gray sides and black belly were caked with mud, for it had been he who had taken an early morning mud bath in the "tub" or "wallow" we had seen down the slope. While the bunch had gone on over the top to bed down, he had lingered behind and stayed on the property by at least a foot.

We took out his entrails and removed his tusks, which, like his antlers, were extra nice. The tusks, it may be said for the benefit of the reader who is not familiar with the

anatomy of an elk, are two large, ivory teeth in the upper jaw. They are valued quite highly, and formerly in some states bull elk were hunted illegally just for the tusks, which sold for fancy prices. Imagine the wanton wastefulness of killing such a grand animal to save only one twenty-five thousandth part of the weight of his carcass and leaving the remainder to rot!

We rode back to camp and got three pack mules and a cowboy to help us, went back, quartered the elk, and packed it—including the trophy, of course—into camp. That hunter was convinced that I was the most wonderful guide in the world. As a matter of fact, we had just had a piece of rare good luck.

On another day Walt Smiley and I took four hunters over into Van Brimmer Canyon deer hunting. We went in a pick-up truck, which we left when we had got into one of the side draws where we expected to find deer. These were all good hunters with whom it was a great pleasure to be out. Two of them went with Walt and two with me, as we spread out to cover opposite sides of the canyon. Within ten minutes after we left the truck, one of Walt's sportsmen got a fine buck. An hour later, I located some deer, which we stalked for a couple of hundred yards. But before we got to within shooting range, Walt's other hunter opened fire with an automatic and shot five or six times almost like a machine gun. That startled the bunch of deer we were trying to get up on. Fortunately they came right toward us.

There were at least a dozen nice mule deer in the bunch, three or four of them bucks, but apparently only one large one. When they were within less than a hundred yards, I whistled and they stopped. One of my men got the big buck with a single shot. The other fired several times at another buck running through the timber, and finally got it, too.

When we got to it we found that it also was a big buck

and had an extraordinary head. The antlers, such as they were, were in the velvet and there was a great mass of gristle-like "velvet"-covered growth across the top of the head, between and around the two antler positions. There were literally dozens of little knobs over this mass of distorted antler growth. Hanging from it were many wattles or appendages of velvety skin with hardened particles in the bottom. Some of these wattles were as much as five or six inches long. This was one of the most unusual velvet-covered sets of antlers I have ever seen.

Abnormal sexual organs, or castration by accident or otherwise is conceded to be the cause of such abnormal antler development. These antlers are not shed as normal antlers are each year. Instead they continue alive without losing the hairy skin-covering (velvet), and continue to develop in abnormal shapes and forms.

This buck was unusually fat and sleek, like a well-fattened steer, but he was not normal sexually, those organs being shriveled and atrophied.

After hog-dressing these bucks, we dragged them down the slope to the bottom of the draw where we could get to them with the truck. We then went on back to where we had left the truck. There we found the hunter who had bagged the first buck, but Walt had taken it and gone after the buck which had been killed with the fast shooting. Soon he was back and we went after the others.

Four very happy hunters and two well-satisfied guides ate lunch and then drove back to Castle Rock.

Ducks had come in on many of the lakes during the fall but no geese were observed. On some of the lakes and beaver dams a few mallards had nested and raised broods of young, but now more were coming in each day. Some of the guests did a little duck shooting at Adams and Bartlett Lakes and also

at Mary's Lake, which lies three miles south of Castle Rock. A couple of hunters were in a blind at Mary's Lake late one afternoon when they observed a nice flock of turkeys come down to the opposite shore to water.

They couldn't figure how to get them that evening, late as it was; besides, they had only shotguns, which were not permitted on turkeys. So they planned to come back the next evening for gobblers rather than ducks. When they returned, they found the shore line where the turkeys had watered more open than they had anticipated, with no suitable place for concealment to wait for their quarry. They spied an old boat anchored to a post in the edge of the lake and decided to use it.

They got in and rowed around a hundred feet or so in the lake and sat there in the boat waiting. Just before sundown the turkeys came again to drink. They were used to the boat being anchored there and did not observe the hunters crouched down in it until too late. Rising at the proper moment, each hunter bagged a nice gobbler. They had a lot of fun telling about how they had been the first men ever to hunt for and kill mountain turkeys from a boat.

The latter part of October, Walt took two hunters over into Pooler Canyon, elk hunting. They killed a three-year-old bull and a yearling. They were both in a place where we could get to them with a team and wagon but not with truck. The bulls were both hog-dressed and left in the woods until the following day to be hauled out. The larger bull was killed right in the bottom of a draw in a little open, grassy spot across which lay a dead pine log perhaps two feet in diameter. The elk carcass was laid across this log to get it up off the ground so it would cool out better.

An elk spoils very quickly even in cold weather if left lying flat on the ground, and they were too heavy to hang without special equipment. One good way to cool them out is, first,

remove the entrails, heart, liver, and lungs, and split both the pelvic bone and the brisket. This can be done with a hunting knife or a good pocket knife, by following the seam in the very center of the pelvic bone, and by slipping off to the side of the brisket, where the ribs join it.

Next, double the front and hind legs in the position they would be if the animal were lying down naturally. Then prop the carcass up straight with body cavity down. See to it that there is ample space at front and back for air to pass through the body cavity freely. In this way, the animal will drain out perfectly; and since no meaty portion will be in contact with the ground but on the doubled legs instead, it will cool fairly well unless the weather is quite warm.

But let's get back to the elk lying across the pine log.

I went back with Walt and his hunters the next day, with team and wagon and a couple of saddle horses, to get the two bulls. We found that a female lion with one or more yearlings had been attracted to this elk. A lion usually kills its own meat, very rarely eating off a carcass of an animal that has died of natural causes or has been killed by man or any other animal. But these lions had become interested in this elk carcass. A look around for clear footprints revealed the fact that this was the Old Lady herself, back with her brood in her old stamping ground, defying me to keep my date with her.

They had eaten a little fat off the entrails (I suspected it was the yearlings that did that); but had not even nibbled elsewhere. However, it looked as if they intended to come back, for they had made an effort to cover up their find, as is their custom when they make their own kill. The entrails lay out in a grassy spot with no leaves or other debris nearby. The hard ground all around showed claw marks where the family of long-tails had made a desperate effort to rake up grass and dirt and gravel to cover the entrails. Considerable material

was thus scraped up against them, but very little could be put on top with the scanty supply available.

The effort to cover the carcass of the bull elk, as it lay across the log, was most interesting; but in reality it was no more than a token of an hereditary custom. Some grass and rubble had been scratched up against the legs and feet, both front and back. Pieces of bark that had loosened and fallen off the pine log had been leaned up against the nose, head, and neck of the elk on one side of the log, and against the thighs and rump on the other side. Some of these pieces of pine bark were small—perhaps three or four inches across—while others were as big as a man's two hands.

These larger pieces, and there were several of them, had been carefully placed. Actually they had been leaned up against the carcass, not just scraped up in a heap as is usually the case with the covering material, consisting of tree needles, leaves, grass, etc. Whether the Old Lady had used her mouth or her claws to place this bark so carefully, it was impossible to determine. But the fact remained that it had been done deliberately and carefully in the absence of more suitable material. Two pieces of bark had been laid on top of the elk's nose.

Walt remarked, "The Old Lady expects to come back."

"Yes," I replied, "and a most remarkable Old Lady she is, too."

I didn't have my dogs with me that day, and it was too late to go back and get them. This sign, however, was the best I had had of the Old Lady and her family since I had first discovered her scar-heeled track in April, more than six months previous; yet, I had repeatedly, in widely separated places, had her track—sometimes alone, sometimes with the family. I determined to keep my date with her very soon. But it so happened that I could not do so right away, because

we first had to thresh some oats and do some other work. The weather was beginning to get cold and I knew trailing lions would soon be easier than it had been in the spring and summer. I was anxious to get back to lion hunting, which had had to be neglected for the past few months. We could expect snow any time now, and that would help still more. I was extremely eager to get a run on the Old Lady and her two or three yearlings, which by now made tracks almost as big as her own. She had been evading me too long.

Chapter 15

Coyotes, Cats, and Lions

EARLY IN NOVEMBER I WAS RIDING UP IN THE RICARDO CREEK COUNTRY when we came upon the remains of a yearling steer around which there was a lot of bear sign. There was little left of the carcass. The head and backbone were there, but the ribs had about all been eaten. Most of the skin was there, in one wrinkled-up piece. That portion of it which had covered the upper part of the legs had been turned wrong side out and pulled down over the lower, meatless portion. This is typical of the way a bear leaves the carcass of an animal which he has killed, or has found fresh and has eaten while the skin is still pliable. He literally pulls and eats the carcass from out of its skin.

Those bear tracks were so large that at first I thought a grizzly had made them. Examination proved that it was just a large black bear. The tracks of the two species are easily distinguished by a difference in shape, especially of the hind

A treed lion looks down at the dogs

One week's catch — 3 lions, 4 bobcats, 3 coyotes. The author's eight-year-old daughter holding muzzled coyote

foot. Another way anyone can distinguish the difference is by the fact that the toe claws of the grizzly are long, nearly straight, with blunt points which come in contact with the ground at every step, making their print from two and a half to four inches ahead of the toe pad. On the contrary, the claws of a black bear are sharper, much shorter, curved, and semi-retractile. They rarely come in contact with the ground except when the bear is climbing a steep hill.

Earlier in the summer I had seen the tracks of a rather large grizzly bear on the rim back of the Club headquarters. Apparently he had just been passing through the country, for I never saw his track again. At that time there were not over a half dozen grizzlies left in the state. Now, perhaps there are none; possibly two or three. In the early days we killed a good many grizzlies in the Pecos, Las Vegas, and Taos ranges. In the southwest part of the state, they were more plentiful, as is recorded in Montague Stevens' book *Meet Mr. Grizzly,* which contains many thrilling stories of grizzly-bear hunting with dogs in the 1890's.

One of my greatest regrets, where wildlife is concerned, is to see the grizzly disappear from the Southwest. It seems inevitable, for, with his wide-ranging habits and persistent, stock-killing proclivities, it is doubtful that he can ever be harmonized with the economic development of the country, as can other big game, including the black bear.

From the sign in this instance, I suspected the yearling had been killed by this big black bear. To find out for sure, I circled uphill and found where the bear had caught the yearling on the slope above in the oak brush. There was plenty of evidence of a struggle. Bushes were bent over, rocks knocked out of place, hair had hung on the brush, and finally, for thirty feet, the yearling had been down and struggling as he was dragged down the slope. The nose of the carcass

showed teeth marks, and one ear was torn half off. There was no question that the bear was guilty.

It had been two days or more since Mr. Bruin had been to the carcass; and since there was nothing left to eat, I did not think he would come back. With winter rapidly approaching, he was due to hibernate very soon, anyway, and as the track was too old to follow, I made no especial effort to find him. I figured that he would be easy to get in the spring when he left hibernation, and I made a mental note to watch for him at the right time, around the first of May.

On my way back I saw in the Pina Flor meadows the largest bunch of wild turkeys I ever saw on the Vermejo property. There were at least a hundred and fifty. And as they ran up the pine-covered hillside at my approach, it looked as if the whole slope were moving. The wild turkeys had come down from the higher areas, and we saw them every day in flocks of a dozen, to forty or fifty. They were around Castle Rock fields, on Adams Lake Mesa, in Van Brimmer and Juan Baca Canyons, and the area between. We would see them in the fields at headquarters and in Spring Canyon. They had come out of the high country and were now in their intermediate range. Later, with the coming of heavy snows, they drifted farther east into lower areas to spend the winter in a less snowy clime.

By the tenth of November practically all the guests were gone, and I was caught up on all other work so that I could devote most of my time to predatory animal control. My job was to be, mainly, cleaning up the lion situation and reducing the bobcats for the protection of deer and turkey. Coyote control was to be incidental to the other work, because we had assistance from the United States Biological Survey in taking coyotes. In fact, two Survey trappers came to the Park in October and were assigned to trap the Costilla and Comanche

Creek areas on the west side of the divide. In spite of the fact that it was against the rules of the Club to use poison in this work, poison was put out by those men and it was necessary for me to keep my dogs out of the Costilla area from then on.

My plan for the winter's work was to run a limited trap line for coyote in connection with lion and bobcat hunting with dogs. I kept my dogs with me when putting out a trap line so that they would know where the sets were and avoid getting caught. Never once during the winter's work did any one of the dogs step into a trap, so well were they trained to avoid them.

Beginning the tenth of November, I put out about twenty traps for coyotes. Then I would spend one day hunting cats and lions with the dogs and the next day running the trap line, taking the dogs along to pick up a lion or fresh cat track if we should find one. In this way, in four and a half months, from November tenth to March twenty-fifth, I took thirteen mountain lions, thirty-nine bobcats, and forty-six coyotes, and had a lot of fun along with hard work doing it.

As soon as I could get around to it, which was about the thirteenth of November, I rode east, leaving before daybreak, to try to find the Old Lady lion who had eluded me so often and who, with her yearlings, had, a couple of weeks before, visited the elk carcass. I rode through the Pooler Canyon area pretty thoroughly and found some old signs, but nothing fresh. Along in the afternoon we crossed over to the north into Juan Baca Canyon and started to work back westward, as we had gone quite a way east in Pooler.

We had not gone far up the canyon when we began to find some encouraging sign, and the dogs became interested. At several places I could see lion tracks in the sand in the dry canyon bottom. It was the Old Lady, sure enough. No mistaking her track, and she had her yearlings with her.

At another place beside an old rotten log there was a small, imperfect scrape, as if made by a young male lion just beginning to adopt that custom. The tracks were several days old, but boy! it looked as if at last we were going to keep our date with the Old Lady. We worked both slopes trying to intercept fresher sign, for it was obvious that the family of longtails had been living in the area for several days and probably had a kill near by.

Finally, on a north slope in the pine timber, we found where they had killed and eaten a doe deer. There was no meat left and it looked as if it had been cleaned up two or three days before, but to our delight, lions had been back messing around it the previous night. It was now three o'clock in the afternoon, and while the tracks were easily workable, they were not hot-fresh. The dogs worked all over that hillside. Everywhere there were lion tracks going every way. Certainly there had been three or four. The tracks were all about the same size, and I was delighted that at last I was on the trail of the Old Lady and her husky yearlings.

But we made no headway; we couldn't get their tracks leading out. So I called the dogs off and we made a big circle to try to pick up the tracks where they had left the area. The only thing we found was a lone, indistinct track, crossing the canyon and leading north, but it was like the ones we had seen in the sand and much older than the tracks we had had back up the slope. That looked to me as if the Old Lady had left the yearlings back on the hillside, and had gone off on a hunt to make another kill for them. Perhaps she had not been successful or, since the yearlings were just about big enough to shift for themselves, perhaps she had made a kill and was feasting on it alone to recuperate from the long, arduous task which had been her lot in suckling the kittens and killing deer to feed and raise them to their present size.

I realized, of course, that we could have missed the fresher tracks and crossed over them, but I didn't think so, because all four of the dogs were greatly pepped up by the scent they had had of lions and were testing the ground and bushes everywhere along our route. It had been over three months since we had caught a lion, and they were anxious for a chase, and trying hard to get into one.

Yet the dogs were working just as steadily as if we had been on a lion hunt every few days. I don't think a dog ever forgets what he has once learned about hunting and trailing. He may, in his over-anxiety for a chase when he hasn't been out regularly, forget discipline for a time. But he just doesn't forget how a lion, a cat, or a bear track smells, nor does he forget how to trail, tree, and fight.

I was convinced, when we found no fresh sign leading away, that our yearling lions were there on that brushy, steep hillside somewhere if we could just find them. It was getting late, and we didn't have much time to get the job done if we were to cash in that day. We hurriedly dropped off the top of the ridge and went back along the slope about halfway from the canyon to the top of the ridge, and ran into all kinds of tracks again, which either were fresher or the cooler air of the late afternoon made them seem so. At any rate, Pup and Puse, stub tails wiggling nervously, were working fast in circles and erratic courses, making slow progress around the hillside.

Little old Queenie was about played out and had stayed higher up on the slope, barking once in a while as if on an old trail.

There was a dense little thicket of young fir and pine timber right above us. When Queenie got to it, the tone of her voice changed to a higher, sharper pitch as she began a steady baying. I knew she had found our lions. Pup and Puse knew it, too, and made off up the hill, yelping as if they were afraid they

would miss out on a good chase. Kate followed, bellowing as if she herself had jumped a lion.

But before they got up there, Queenie's voice changed again, and I knew she had a long-tail up a tree. In an instant Pup and Puse and then Kate verified the fact as they in turn reached the tree. It thrilled me as always to hear them bark "treed." I rode up and shot the yellow, long-tailed young lion out with my six-shooter. It was a husky yearling female and very fat, as if it had been living high. And indeed why shouldn't it, with a couple of deer a week to feast on, with perhaps a porcupine and a few rabbits thrown in from time to time for good measure?

It was now sundown, and we set out at once to find another yearling or the Old Lady if, perchance, she were there; but I didn't think she was. It didn't take Puse long to hit a track leading out of the thicket where the first lion had treed. Evidently the yearlings had been lying up in the thicket for the day, waiting for the Old Lady to come back and guide them to a new kill.

The second lion ran straight around the hillside for a half mile before Puse caught up with it and put it up a pine tree. It was getting pretty dark now to shoot, but the lion was only thirty feet away and outlined against the sky. I shot it out, without difficulty. It was also a female the same size as the first one, but a darker-colored, big, husky yearling. I knew then, positively, that there was still another yearling, a male, for I had seen the scrape he had made. Up until then I had not been sure whether there were two or three young lions in this litter.

We made an effort to find the third one, but did not locate it quickly. It was getting quite dark; so we went on back to Castle Rock, feeling certain that we could come back next day and pick up both the yearling and the Old Lady. I had no

idea that the Old Lady would be difficult to get, or give us any trouble. In that regard we had a surprise coming.

The next day I went back with a pack horse, for we had just left the lions lying where they fell, and I wanted to pack them in. We went straight to the place where we had killed the first yearling, but the others had not been around. We then went to the old deer kill we had found, but saw nothing fresh there, either. That made it sure that the Old Lady hadn't been back, for she would have been hunting her young ones. Perhaps she had abandoned them for good, but I didn't think so; sooner or later she would be back.

Our job right now was to find the male yearling lion and dispose of him, and the Old Lady could wait. We went back to where we had killed the second lion the evening before, and picked up his track there. He had gone up the hill and eastward and then just wandered about all night over the brushy hillside. It was slow going, following his erratic course, which often crossed his own track. We worked for a couple of hours and were obviously gaining quite a bit all the time.

In an oak thicket we jumped him, and Puse put him up a tree inside a quarter of a mile. He was larger than the other two and darker in color. He was in a small Douglas fir tree standing on some limbs, about fifteen feet from the ground. He was nervously watching the dogs, who could see him plainly and were really making the woods ring with their baying. Puse and Pup would try to climb the tree and would bite off pieces of bark and limbs in their frantic desire to get to their quarry. Once old Pup grabbed a young fir tree about two feet high in his teeth, and tugged at it until he pulled it up by the roots. Why? Ask Pup. I don't know.

I was not twenty feet from the lion when I shot it with my .45 Colt. I aimed for a heart shot, which at that distance one

couldn't miss, even with a pistol. At the crack of the gun, the lion sprang from the tree to the slope below and ran, tail high in the air, as fast as I ever saw any animal travel, for about eighty yards. The dogs were being out-distanced when he went up another tree about ten feet, stopped, quivered, and fell backward to the ground, stone dead.

The big lead bullet had passed straight through his body and directly through the heart. Yet he had jumped from the tree, sprinted eighty yards, and started to climb another tree. I have frequently seen deer and elk run from fifty to two hundred yards after being shot through the heart, but never before or since have I seen a lion show that kind of vitality.

We spent a little while making one more circle for the Old Lady's track, but when we failed to find it, we went on back and got the three yearling lions and packed them on in to Castle Rock. On the way in, the dogs picked up the hot trail of a big, old tom bobcat, and treed him after a short chase; so I went in with three lions and a bobcat.

Next day I had to run my traps, for I had not been to them for two days. I was fortunate that day, too, for I had a badger, two coyotes, and one bobcat. I reset my traps, skinned one of the coyotes, and took the other animals all to Castle Rock, and put them in a cold place so they wouldn't spoil, for I wanted to get a picture of my first week's work after starting in earnest on predator control. I had one more day to go to make out the week and had high hopes for taking the Old Lady lion that day. She was due to be back to where she had left her yearlings.

Leaving Castle Rock before daylight, we went right back to the scene where we had killed the yearling lions. We very soon hit the Old Lady's track; she had been back, all right, two nights before and the night before, and had literally been all over that hillside from top to bottom for a distance of

a mile or more. She had circled and doubled back and wound around through the rocks and brush everywhere in search of her overgrown babies. She had been to the place where each was killed, had probably smelled the blood of her offspring but had continued the search.

Perhaps the animal mind cannot readily or fully grasp the meaning of death of their young. A cow will come back to her dead calf for days after it has died. At any rate, the Old Lady left no place unsearched in that vicinity. We could never get her track leaving the area, nor could we find her in it. We spent nearly all day trying, but finally had to give it up. She had some way slipped out, or eluded us by criss-crossing her trail so badly that the dogs couldn't work it out. I began to wonder if I was ever going to keep my date with her.

On the way back, we were again fortunate in picking up the track of another bobcat, which the dogs quickly brought to bay in a large pine tree. That was a really big cat, and fat as could be. Later when I examined its stomach contents, the remains of a turkey and part of a wood rat were found. From long years of observation, it is my considered judgment that the bobcat is the worst predator enemy of Merriam's mountain wild turkey.

It was not yet sundown when we killed the bobcat, and so it would be possible to swing around part of my line of coyote traps. That I determined to do, to take advantage of the full week's catch, even though it would make it very late when I got in. It had been dark when I left that morning and I could find my way back in the dark.

Again my traps had been lucky. In one I found a bobcat, which I killed and skinned right there, because I couldn't well carry more than the one I already had on the back of my saddle.

In another trap I had a coyote. This one I tied up alive

and carried it in front of me on the saddle, for the remaining two miles into Castle Rock. The reason for doing that was that I needed some coyote bait, the very best base for which is pure coyote urine. This can be obtained only from a live coyote, for it is a rare thing to find more than a few drops of urine in the bladder of a coyote when killed.

My first week was up. The score was better by far than I had hoped. It was three lions, three coyotes, four bobcats, and one badger. (The badger is not classed as a predator, but the holes it makes digging out prairie dogs cause many a saddle horse to fall with its rider. I'll tell about one instance later.)

That was a record I could not hope to keep up, but once, later, I did exceed it for one week's catch, with three coyotes, two cats, and five lions.

Naturally, when one is hunting for the specific purpose of getting rid of predatory animals which are depleting a game supply and damaging livestock, he tries to kill all of the predators that he can. Yet in hunting as a business, just as in hunting purely for sport, the thrills, excitement, and enjoyment are experienced along the trail in pursuit of the quarry and not at the kill. That is especially true when hunting with a pack of trained dogs, whether they be cold-nosed hounds, Airedales, beagles, or what have you.

The greatest satisfaction in every chase is in watching the dogs work, particularly when the going is tough or the action fast and dangerous. As the pack works persistently, trying to make out an old, cold lion trail, one learns, by close observance, to understand its reactions to the constantly changing situations that arise.

For instance, the trail is lost. The dogs, who have been trailing together, start circling each on his own to find it again. Their noses work fast, testing every likely spot for the familiar scent. They work silently and their tails wag slowly as they

circle and cut back and forth, hunting anxiously in an ever-widening area for the scent of another track to guide them on.

Then one of the pack gets a faint whiff where the lion has been. He stops still. His body becomes tense. His nose moves ever so slowly over the spot to verify his first impression. His tail begins to wag faster and with more emphasis. If another dog sees him in that posture, he will understand and come to him. When he is sure he has found the trail, he will start forward, giving tongue in a manner and tone of voice that will say as plainly as words, "Here it is. Let's go!" The others will come in a hurry, sometimes stopping to verify for themselves the find, but often accepting the other one's word for it, and plunge forward with him in full cry to pick up the track further on.

The tone of voice and manner of barking will tell other dogs and the hunter whether the trail is old or fresh, and often whether it is a lion, bobcat, or bear. When the track suddenly freshens one will know it, and when the dogs bark "treed" one will recognize the fact a mile away. To listen to and watch all that is intensely interesting.

Then too, the pack on the trail of a lion or bear will lead one through rough, out-of-the-way places he would never otherwise see. I once found two perfectly preserved Indian pots where they had been cached, perhaps a hundred years before, high on a shelf of a cliff, because a lion's trail passed that way.

One has an unexcelled chance, if he will but take advantage of it, to observe other wildlife, its signs and activities, the vegetation, rocks, and often some grand scenery. He can learn a great deal about the habits of the animal he is following. It is inevitable that he will learn to respect the intelligence and ability of his dogs, to understand them, and to enjoy their companionship.

My greatest satisfaction and pleasure was always along the trail.

It took me all day to skin and stretch the skins of the animals taken that first week, and it was several days before I did any more lion hunting, and then lots happened before I hit the elusive Old Lady's track again.

Chapter 16

Winter Comes to the Park

THERE IS AN OLD SAYING IN NEW MEXICO THAT ANYONE WHO HAS THE temerity to predict the weather a day ahead is either a newcomer or a fool. Neither Mr. Talle nor I were newcomers by a long shot, and certainly neither of us would have pleaded guilty to the alternative. Yet one morning in November, 1930, our weather forecast proved to be correct and the action based upon it wisely taken.

Very early on the morning of November 19, Mr. Talle brought some guests to Castle Rock for me to take out elk hunting. An arctic wind was blowing in steadily from the northeast. The damp, frost-laden air chilled one through and through. Low clouds were drifting in and frost crystals were beginning to collect on the windward side of trees and bushes.

We shivered as we discussed the ominous weather prospects,

and soon concluded we were in for a really bad snowstorm, which might block the roads to the outside indefinitely. Some way, we instinctively felt that a big snowstorm was brewing. We advised our guests to leave the Park right then, or take a chance on being snowed in for a month or six weeks.

They were reluctant to give up their hunting trip, but accepted our advice and drove back to Trinidad that day. They expected to return if it didn't storm badly. But the blizzard struck with great fury before they got to town.

Mr. Talle hurriedly made the rounds of his cattle camps that day, making every preparation possible for taking care of his twelve thousand head of cattle, for the fall work of weaning calves and getting the stock distributed to their winter ranges had not yet been completed. To help him out, I put on an extra sweater under my leather jacket and rode over to the Carrizozo Camp, about ten miles distant. By the time I got there, the clouds had thickened and it was beginning to snow.

I delivered Mr. Talle's message, had hot coffee, biscuits, and beans, and started back to Castle Rock. I had stayed not more than an hour, but a good three inches of snow had fallen in that time. The snow was driving in from the northeast on the wings of an icy gale. Frost formed on my eyelashes and the hair below my hat, and nipped at my ears as I faced right into the wind-driven snow all the way back. It was also a very miserable trip for the horse, which, with his frost-covered head lowered, would turn his nose first to one side and then the other, trying to evade the force of the wintry blast.

I was chilled through when I got home at three-thirty. With my feet in the oven while I drank hot coffee, it was not long until I was warm again.

We needed some supplies, and so decided to drive the twelve miles down to the headquarters commissary and back while we could. There were by then six inches of snow on the

ground, but we thought we could make it all right, anyway. My wife and eight-year-old girl, Dorothy, went along just for the ride; but I should never have taken them out in such a storm.

The snow got deeper as we went down Rock Creek and, to our surprise, was piled deeper yet down on the Vermejo River, where usually it would have been lighter than at Castle Rock on account of the great difference in elevation. By the time we got our groceries and an extra five gallons of gas, it was getting prematurely dark and still snowing like nobody's business. At least fourteen inches had fallen, and it was drifting badly.

As Walt Smiley helped me tighten up my heavy tire chains, he begged us to spend the night with him. "There's just no sense in starting out at night in such a blizzard."

I replied, "Oh, we'll make it, and the snow will give me a good chance to catch some bobcats and maybe some lions in the next few days."

"You'll be sorry," Walt said. "I don't think you can make it."

We set out, anyway, but were soon to regret it.

The snow had drifted so it had almost obliterated the car tracks we had made going down and upon which we were counting to enable us to make it back.

At the mouth of Rock Creek, about half way to Castle Rock, we could no longer see the road or the deep arroyo alongside it, and driving became dangerous. I had to go ahead afoot in the car lights, and mark the road as far as I could in the blinding snow, and then go back and drive up to the end of my tracks. We could barely break through some of the drifts, and had to use low gear all the time.

There were worse grades ahead and it became doubtful if we could make it, after all. We considered trying to turn around and go back, for it was bitter cold and the snow was

getting deeper all the time. But the road was too narrow to turn the car, and we couldn't do that.

We kept trying and made some progress; then the lights went out. We were now in a predicament, sure enough. I tried marking the road by use of a flashlight, and then driving ahead while my wife held the light out the window to guide us. That proved too slow; we would never make it that way. We decided we would have to either fix the lights or spend the night there. The heater in the car wasn't working, but I knew we could find fuel and easily get a fire started, to keep from freezing, for we had an extra can of gasoline. But at that, it wasn't a pleasant prospect for a woman and little girl to spend the night out in a storm like that.

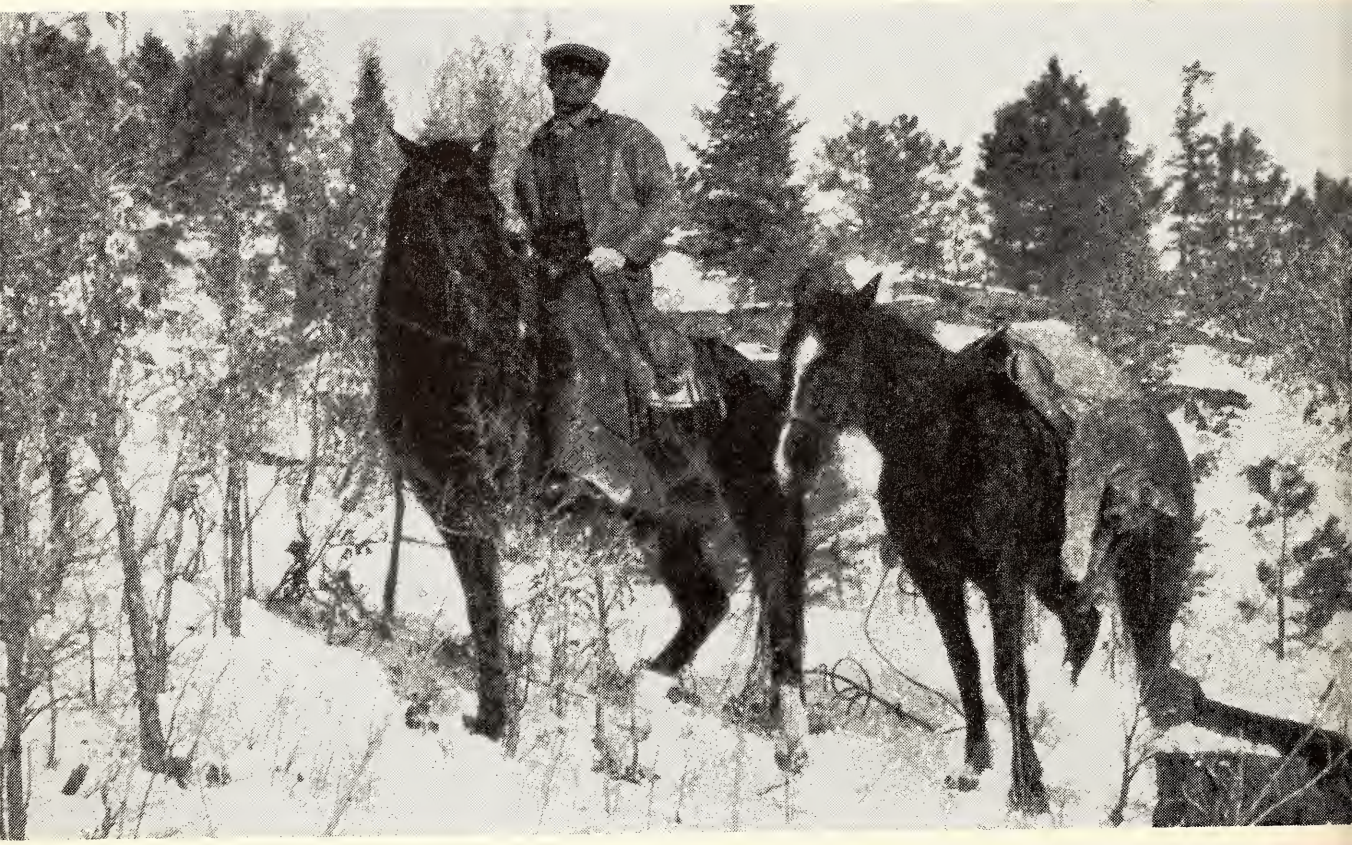
With numb fingers I tinkered with the light wiring but could find nothing wrong. I put in a new fuse which I thought was all right, but it did no good. As a last resort, I took the fuse out, rolled a piece of tinfoil (off some chewing gum we had bought) into a roll the same size as the fuse, inserted it, and the lights came on again. Was that a lucky break for us! It saved us a most miserable night by a campfire in a blizzard.

From there on, we made it better, as the road was rutted and we could see it well enough to keep from going into an arroyo. We made the steeper grades by rushing them as far as we could and then backing up and trying again and again, in the same tracks, making just a little new headway each time.

At last, when we had almost given up hope, again we came out on top, and made the remaining two miles easily. Not until we were inside, out of the storm, by a good hot stove, did we realize how lucky we were to make it up those hills through the drifted snow. It had taken us four hours to travel twelve miles. Such are the hazards of travel in winter over remote mountain roads.

The next day was very cold and it continued to spit snow a

The author with "The Old Lady" and her mate



The author on Brownie, packing in a big lion on Dixie

little all day; but the force of the storm was spent. We had only ten inches at Castle Rock, but learned it was eighteen inches at headquarters, and thirty inches on Red River at the northeast corner of the ranch. There, a few days later, when we were moving cattle out to a better place, many of them fell into snow-filled arroyos and had to be pulled out. Skeet Williams, while breaking track to lead a herd over to York Canyon, rode off into one drifted so full that it was over his head on horseback.

Our guests, who had got out just in time, were tied up by blocked highways for four days at Trinidad. We didn't get a car out of the Park for six weeks. Travel on almost all state highways was paralyzed for days, while it was estimated that no less than twelve hundred cars of big game hunters were stalled in the mountains of the southwest part of the state for nearly a week.

The cattle foreman moved his main camp to Castle Rock, where many cattle had yet to be worked and then moved to their winter ranges. We all had to turn out our grass-fat, summer mounts, get in our winter horses, and put them on full hay and grain feed. The complete transition from a fall operation to a full-fledged winter campaign had been forced upon us in a period of two days.

The second morning after the storm, on November 21, Skeet started up through the south field, then turned and rode back to the barn where I was saddling my horse. "Come take a look," he said, and rode back the way he had come. I got on my horse and followed, and really got an eyeful.

There, in the upper field in the early morning sun, were congregated the most elk I ever saw at one time. Beginning a quarter of a mile from where we were, and extending for half a mile, the whole valley was full of elk. It looked, at first glance, like a big cattle roundup. Then, as the rangy elk

shape and the buff and gray, black-necked colors became apparent, with a few big bulls, antlers held high, scattered here and there through the herd, the scene resolved into one of the most magnificent sights I had ever seen. The deep snow in the high country had driven them from their summer ranges. They were slowly drifting toward their winter range in the lower areas.

"How many?" I asked, as they began to move on.

"A hell of a lot!" Skeet said.

As best I could, I estimated there were between six and seven hundred. As there were comparatively few big bulls, it was evident (as we actually found later to be the case) that some of the big, lordly beasts had chosen to battle the snowdrifts higher up until spring.

Some elk had broken the fence at a big haystack, and I spent a while fixing it and chasing the elk away. I then rode over to Van Brimmer Canyon to check up on some of my coyote traps. All were buried deeply in the snow, with no chance to catch anything; so I decided just to leave my whole trap line that way until the snow went off some, and meanwhile to devote my entire time to hunting cats and lions. I was betting the Old Lady wouldn't get away from us in this snow.

On the way back that afternoon, I saw a band of fifteen or twenty elk back at the haystack, testing the fence. I rode around to the west so as to head them toward their winter range. I wanted to give them a good scare; so I put in after them as fast as my horse could run across the snow-covered flat, which looked smooth as a landing field.

Standing up in the stirrups and leaning forward, with my horse in a dead run, we gained on the fleeing elk until there was no more than fifty feet between us. Then, what every cowboy fears, happened. My horse stepped into a big badger hole, drifted full of snow, and turned a somersault.

As we went down, I sailed out over his head with arms and legs spread out like a flying squirrel leaping from a tree. I hit the ground a belly-buster, fifteen feet ahead of where the horse had gone down, then scooted through the snow on my face and stomach for another fifteen feet. It is a good thing I did, for the horse turned completely over and his hips hit the ground right where I had landed, only a slim fraction of a second after I had slid on.

If there had been no snow to drift in and conceal the hole, the horse probably would not have fallen. But if he had fallen and thrown me that way without eight or ten inches of snow to break the fall, I would surely have been injured. As it was, the breath was knocked out of me, and one knee was bruised a little, but in five minutes I was back in the saddle and ready to go again.

The next day I set out at sunup, with the thermometer registering ten degrees below zero, to hunt bobcats, in the heads of Pooler and Gachupin Canyons. The snow had not yet melted enough to crust at night, and we were sure to get any cat whose track we might cross. I took only Pup and Puse, in order to keep Queenie and Kate fresh for a hunt for the Old Lady, which I expected to make a few days later. The snow made hard going for horse and dogs alike, and we could not make much time.

By nine o'clock we were well over the ridge, on the slopes of Pooler Canyon. There we struck our first track. In another hour, without any difficulty, we had put a nice bob-tailed cat up a tree. I shot him out with my pistol. Then I built a fire, for it was a cold day, and skinned the cat there by it.

We circled back into Gachupin Canyon and picked up another single track and were able to tree and skin that cat, in much the same manner that we had got the first one. They had both traveled a considerable distance in search of food,

but in the eight to ten inches of snow did not run far when we jumped them.

By the time the second cat had been skinned, it was noon. I built a fire under a pine tree and ate my lunch before setting out again.

After lunch we went on a little way and, without incident worthy of mention, treed, killed, and skinned another bobcat. There was still time for a fourth one if we could hit a track soon; so we set out again, determined to make it four of a kind. Luck was with us, or so it seemed, for within a short while the dogs picked up another track on the south slope of Pooler Canyon and headed south toward Gachupin. They were not trailing fast; so I kept pretty well up with them. They topped out on the ridge and had started down toward Gachupin Canyon when they jumped Mr. Cat out of some rocks. Pup and Puse were hot on his trail now, running fast. I stopped where the bobcat had been jumped to watch them go out around the opposite slope, thinking perhaps I would see the cat forced to take a tree.

As they crossed the side draw, running at full speed, with heads up and yelping steadily, I knew the cat was only a little way ahead, but I did not see him. Halfway around the slope out of the draw, both dogs suddenly stopped, turned back for a few feet, and silently began testing another track of some kind. They put their noses down into the tracks in the snow for two or three steps, then took out up the hill at right angles to the direction they had been traveling. They ran fast, but did not give tongue, and I couldn't quite make out what had happened. The cat would not have turned up the hill there; and if he had, the dogs would have continued to bark as was their custom on a track that fresh.

I loped my horse over there as quickly as I could, to find out what the score was. Pup and Puse had scored all right,

for they were now on the biggest kind of a lion track, made some time the night before. While running the track of a bobcat not two minutes ahead of them, they had crossed a lion track at least ten hours old—perhaps more—and had each scented it at the same time, had turned to confirm their first impression, and had abandoned the hot cat track to pursue their preferred game, which had passed many hours before.

How sensitive must be a dog's nose to do a thing like that! The air must have been saturated with bobcat scent, for the dogs were running heads up, paying no attention to the actual track made two minutes before, while there had been ten hours or more for the lion's scent to be dispersed. What great ability a dog must have to pick out and recognize a teeny bit of old lion scent from a great volume of fresh bobcat scent, when both enter his nostrils at the same time. Those are things which we have yet to learn from a dog.

A good hound is a wonderful animal, and compared to one, for hunting purposes, an Airedale would by some be despised. I, too, love a good hound. They have their strong points and certain advantages over even a good hunting Airedale. Yet, the good Airedale has his strong points, too, and in certain fields can surpass a hound. Whatever the comparative merits of the two breeds are, any dog that can do a thing such as I had just witnessed, deserves very great credit.

It was three o'clock. The lion track led to the top of the ridge between Pooler and Gachupin Canyons. Then it led eastward along the ridge, dropping off first on one side and then the other; but the general direction was directly away from home. Pup and Puse were trailing fast and I could not keep up with them. I rode on the trail as hard as I could, cutting corners wherever I could, for I wanted to get to the tree, where I knew the dogs would soon have the big, old long-tail at bay, before it was too dark to shoot.

On and on they went, always eastward, getting farther from home all the time. My horse had already had a hard day and was getting tired. I rode much harder than I like to ride a horse, but who has not when following dogs on a lion or bear trail? The lion was traveling, not hunting, and had kept moving all day instead of lying up for the day as lions usually do.

It was sundown when I heard the dogs bark "treed," but they were still down the ridge a mile away. I rode on down, and there, lying in a fork of a large piñon tree, was our big tawny, long-tailed cat. He was not over ten feet off the ground, and I was afraid he might jump and run again. I got off and approached very slowly and cautiously, pistol drawn and ready for a quick shot should he start to jump. But he showed no signs of fear or nervousness, and I walked right up to within twenty feet of the tree, not over twenty-five feet from the lion. I needed to be close to make a clean kill in the rapidly approaching darkness. His big gray head against the sky made a perfect target, and I put a forty-five bullet squarely between his eyes. He hung in the fork for a moment, then slid backward and fell to the ground dead. I left him right there until I could come back after him with a pack horse next day. He was the largest lion of the sixteen I killed that year at Vermejo Park, and I believe he was the elusive Old Lady's mate, because I had several times seen the old sign of a very large male lion in the same areas used by the Old Lady.

It was getting dark. We were nearly twenty miles from camp. My horse was almost played out. I was tired too. It was cold and would get colder as the night progressed. Not a pleasant predicament to be in! But we had taken three nice bobcats and a great big tom lion. It was worth it, I thought, as we started home.

The trip back to Castle Rock along the snowy, trailless

route was not a pleasant one. It was zero weather. I would walk and lead my tired horse for a while to help him and to keep warm. Then I would ride a while. There was no moon, but the snow made it light enough to travel easily. There was no danger of becoming confused, for all I had to do was follow the ridge westward to where it dropped off into Castle Rock basin.

At eleven-thirty, I got to the barn with the tiredest horse I have ever ridden. There I found Skeet Williams and his crew of cowboys saddling their horses.

"What's the big idea starting to work this hour of the night?" I asked.

Skeet said, "We thought you had got lost or hurt and were just setting out to hunt you up."

"Go on back to bed," I said. "I'll always get in; just give me time."

At the house I found that my wife had become worried (why she should after having lived with me over twenty years, I don't know) about ten o'clock and had gone over to the cabin where the cowboys were staying to wake Skeet up and ask him to take his boys and try to find me. Skeet had told her I was all right. They compromised by agreeing to wait until eleven o'clock, and if I wasn't in by then, they would try to find me. Skeet kept his bargain and was ready to start out when I came in—a very thoughtful but unnecessary procedure.

The next day Tom Talle, Jr., who was working with Skeet's outfit, went with me after the lion. We took a pack mule to bring him in whole, for I wanted the meat for dog food.

On our way back we came along the ridge between Pooler and Gachupin Canyons to where there was a gap or saddle to be crossed. As we started down the slope, we saw some elk

passing through the saddle and some on the opposite slope. The herd was spread out and feeding on oak, mountain mahogany brush, and grass that protruded through the snow. They had not seen us. We got off our horses and slipped down a little closer, keeping well concealed, to count them as they passed by.

It took nearly an hour for all of them to pass us, as they were feeding while traveling. My count was three hundred and fifty cows, calves, and bulls, while Tommy's was three hundred and fifty-four. Before we got to Castle Rock, we saw two more bunches of elk, totaling about a hundred head.

They were now bunched up and on their winter range.

Chapter 17

The Old Lady Meets Her Match

THE OLD LION WHOSE YEARLING CUBS WE HAD TAKEN IN JUAN BACA CANYON before the storm, had not been forgotten. I had thought perhaps we might strike her tracks in Pooler or Gachupin Canyon while hunting bobcat, but failed to do so. We did get her mate there, so that she was the only one left of the family. It was near the last of the month before I had opportunity to go back into Juan Baca Canyon to try to find her. The weather had not warmed up much and the snow still lay deep on the shaded north exposures, but had melted down some on the sunny slopes facing the south.

Tommy Talle had wanted to go out lion hunting with me, and I had waited several days for him to find time from the cattle work to go. Finally, he told me he would not be able to get away and not to wait any longer for him. As usual, therefore, I had to go alone, which was all right except that it seemed a shame that there was no one to share with me the

great pleasure and thrills (and, incidentally, the hardships) of these cat and lion hunts.

I have always hunted on the theory that one hour early in the morning is worth two or three or four later in the day. Hence, even in the cold winter months, I always tried to be in the saddle by sunup. It gets pretty nippy sometimes at that time of day, when the thermometer is from zero to twenty degrees below, but the saving of valuable time is worth enduring it.

It was on such a morning that we (my dogs, horse, and I) started out from Castle Rock to try to find the Old Lady lion in Juan Baca Canyon. We cross-cut the head of the canyon on some of the known lion-traveled routes but found no lion sign. For once we were passing up cat tracks, because I wanted to have all day for the Old Lady if necessary. We went on down Juan Baca Canyon several miles, where the canyon boxes in for a little way, to a point even with the place where we had taken the yearlings and where we had last had the mothers' track.

Right there we struck the Old Lady's scarred-heel track. It was made the night before and headed north. The snow was deeper here than at Castle Rock and was drifted in many places. The dogs, Pup, Puse, and Kate, needed no encouragement but were at once off on the trail. I followed on without much haste, as there seemed to be no need for hurrying. The dogs couldn't miss on a trail like that, and I was sure the Old Lady wouldn't get far before they would catch up with her. Then I recalled how many times I had seen her track before and failed to get her.

When I topped out, I found the track had turned eastward for half a mile or so along the high ridge overlooking the Vermejo Creek Valley. In the valley below, I could see the Club commissary and post office buildings, and the million-

dollar Club headquarters a mile and a half farther east. At a point on the ridge almost opposite the commissary, perhaps two miles southwest of it, the dogs had jumped our lion, and the tracks turned abruptly north to the limestone rim rocks.

These cliffs extended for miles in either direction just below the crest of the ridge. This ridge, south of Vermejo Creek, is quite high, rising perhaps twelve hundred feet above the canyon floor. The slope to the north into the canyon is very steep, especially near the top, where there are several strata of limestone cliffs, with very narrow, rocky, brush-covered slopes intervening.

At the top of the first cliff, I found Pup and Kate baying and running back and forth, trying to find a place to go down. Puse was not in sight nor did I hear him at first. I left Dixie up on top of the windswept ridge and walked down to the cliff, then worked my way around one end of it where there was a wide crevice. Then it was that I first heard Puse. I worked my way down through the crevice a little farther to a shelf below the first ledge of rock. Then I could see him about fifty feet around the cliff on a level with me.

Puse was on a narrow shelf not more than six feet wide, and was barking viciously at the lion, which I could tell was backed in against the cliff, not three feet from him. He had followed the lion over the cliff, which had a sheer drop of at least ten feet, down to this shelf, and had caught the Old Lady there in a spot where she had thought she would be safe from the dogs. Puse was really telling it to her, right to her teeth, and I feared he would go in and grab her any moment and get hurt.

I could not see the lion from where I was because of her being backed into a little hollow in the face of the cliff. Once in a while I could see one of her front feet as she would strike at Puse. Never could I get sight of her head to shoot her.

I did not know how I could get her out, for it was impossible to go around the shelf to where Puse was. I was afraid that if I didn't do something soon she might catch Puse and seriously injure him.

I threw some rocks into the place close to where she was, but this did no good. Finally, I fired a shot so the bullet from my pistol would hit the cliff just beyond where she was. When the bullet hit the rock with a smack and raised a cloud of dust, out she came.

The Old Lady rushed past Puse and leaped over the edge of the twenty-foot cliff, landing all spraddled out in the deep snow below. Puse followed without looking or caring where he would land—he just wasn't going to let that lion out of his sight; and he didn't. He landed right at her tail. The Old Lady was handicapped by the very deep, soft snow which lay on this north slope. But the trail she made through it helped Puse to get through.

Pell-mell they went down through the brush and rocks for two hundred yards. Then Puse crowded her too closely, barking right at her tail, and she was forced to take a tree or be caught on the ground. She chose a small brushy pine tree and went up it only eight or ten feet.

By that time Pup and Kate, who had followed me down through the first ledge, had found a way to get on down over the next cliff and soon had joined Puse at the tree. I could see the Old Lady's brown back plainly, but had to get much closer to kill her. I worked my way back around the shelf I was on until I found a place to slide down to the next ledge. The snow was very deep, and the rocks on the steep slope beneath it were wet and slick, which made the going dangerous. A misstep or a slip meant that over the cliff one would go.

At last I found a place where I could slide down over the last ledge safely. I was getting pretty wet from wallowing

around in snow two feet deep on the ground and still clinging to bushes and trees. When I got within fifty yards of the tree, I saw the Old Lady was going to jump and I drew my forty-five to shoot, but the holster had got filled with snow, and I had to clean the gun a little before firing.

By the time I had the pistol ready, the Old Lady had jumped out of the tree like a flying squirrel and was bounding down the slope. She didn't get far before the dogs forced her up another tree, this time a big Douglas fir, and she went away up high in it as if she meant to stay. She lay panting across a couple of limbs, looking down at the dogs, her long, black-tipped tail hanging limp through the branches. I went on down and, from the steep slope above the tree, shot her near the heart, and down she came, but still able to fight some. But she was mortally wounded and it didn't take the dogs long to stretch her out. Old Queenie would have enjoyed this catch, but the over-exertion of her last hunt had stiffened her up so much that she was never able to go again.

The Old Lady, as we had been referring to her ever since I had first seen her scar-heeled track seven months before, was really a big, and a very old, female lion. Her teeth were worn and broken, and she was not fat and sleek as the yearlings and her mate had been. A big piece of her left hind foot pad was missing, perhaps cut off by a trap. She showed the wear and tear of raising a litter of young ones.

She wouldn't be bothered that way any more, but she had tried hard to escape the dogs. She had gone over the first cliff where mighty few dogs could follow; then she had jumped off a ledge twenty feet high to get away. But in each case Puse went where she went and kept right after her. In Puse she had at last met her match. There is always a little regret at reaching the end of the trail, and I knew I would miss seeing her scar-heeled track.

We had killed her a little over three hundred yards below the base of the rim rocks, and I had left Dixie on top of the ridge above the rim rocks. There was no possibility of getting Dixie down this way, so there seemed to be nothing to do but to leave the Old Lady's carcass there, go back to Dixie and go a long way around to get her off the cliffs, and then come in from below. It was a plenty rough piece of country, afoot or horseback.

I started to climb back up the hill, but it wasn't as easy as it had been going down. Finally I reached the base of the cliffs down which I had slid and climbed. The rocks were slick and I found it impossible to get either footing or handholds to enable me to climb up the way I had come down. I knew the cliffs were worse around to the left; so I tried it the other way. I worked there, wallowing around in the deep snow, for two hours trying to find a way to get up, but just couldn't make it. Had it been dry and no snow, there were several places I could have climbed out. But with one's footwear, clothes, and gloves wet, and the rocks slick with snow and ice, it was quite a different thing.

Finally, I had to give it up. The only alternative was to walk down to the commissary and get a horse there, and go around and get Dixie. At the commissary there were no saddle horses available, except a pony, which one of the farm hands loaned me to go on over to the Club house where Mr. Talle lived. It was now two-thirty and Mr. Talle had just got in from one of the camps. I was very wet and cold now, and neither of us had eaten since early morning.

Mrs. Talle had a big fire going in the fireplace—just what I needed to dry out my clothes. Mr. Talle poured out a too-big drink of whiskey for me and insisted that I drink it. We sat there talking for half an hour or so. I had become a bit drowsy by the time Mrs. Talle announced dinner was

ready. When I got up to go into the dining room, I was dizzy-headed and couldn't walk straight. The big drink of whiskey on an empty stomach taken when I was cold, and then my getting a little too warm, had made me drunk—the only time I was ever drunk in my life.

I tried very hard not to let Mr. and Mrs. Talle know it. But they caught on before I got to the table, and had a good laugh at my expense. As long as Mr. Talle lived he kidded me about getting drunk on a single drink.

The good food and two cups of hot coffee sobered me up quickly.

Mr. Talle got Buster, a big, fine saddle horse, for me to ride back to Castle Rock, for it was too late by that time to go back after Dixie. Mr. Talle also arranged to have one of the men take a horse and follow my back tracks to where I had left the Old Lady lion, and bring her in. He sent her on up to Castle Rock the next day in a pick-up that was going that way.

The following day I rode Buster back after Dixie. I had just dropped the reins when I left her the day before, as I never needed to tie her up. We found her within fifty feet of where I had got off. She had grazed a little bit where the wind had blown the snow off the ridge top. She had backed around over the little area as she grazed, to keep from stepping on the bridle reins. She was glad to see us and led right at Buster's heels all the way in home.

On the way back to Castle Rock that afternoon, we cut through the head of a dark timbered draw and hit the track of a very large bobcat. It wasn't right fresh, but I let the dogs go on it, anyway. To my surprise, inside of a quarter of a mile the dogs barked "treed." When I rode down there, I found they had a most unusually large, gray-colored cat up a tree. Upon killing him, I found that he was blind in one

eye, but that's not why the dogs got up on him so soon. Instead, I found that he had a kill right there and had evidently been eating on it when the dogs suddenly ran in on him, and he took the first tree he could reach.

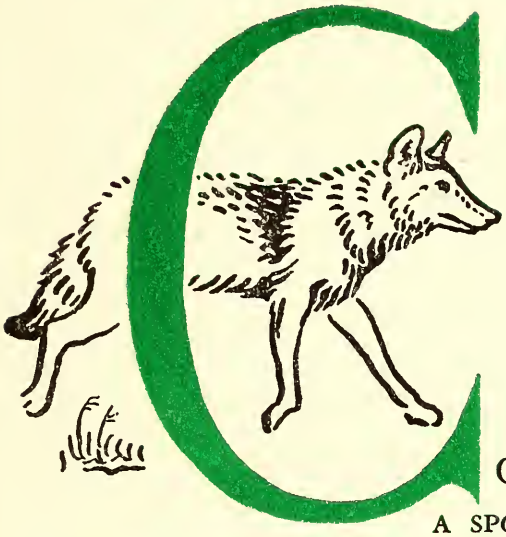
The kill was a long yearling doe deer. It would have weighed, hog-dressed, about sixty-five or seventy pounds. It had been killed since the snow had fallen, and there were no other tracks around. The cat had done quite a bit of traveling around there, but the tracks were still visible, showing where he had caught the deer and killed it. He had covered it over with snow and tree needles much as a lion covers his kills.

I have seen only one other case where a bobcat killed a deer bigger than a fawn.

During the next few days, I got in all my coyote traps, having a coyote in one.

I spent a few days more hunting bobcat from Castle Rock. Then we moved to a house down at the Club headquarters where I would be in better location to work the east end of the ranch where it had been reported there were some lions.

Chapter 18



Coyote Trapping

COYOTE TRAPPING IS NOT A SPORT; IT IS A LABORIOUS SCIENCE. Some of the most highly skilled men I have ever known have been coyote and wolf trappers. They were as well trained in their profession as electricians, doctors, or college professors in theirs. Many of these men have little education according to ordinary standards, yet they are highly educated in the ways and means of capturing the most astute and elusive predator of the West.

I cannot qualify as one of these; yet I have had some success in trapping coyotes, and have got a great deal of satisfaction in occasionally being able to outsmart an old trap-wise rascal. The successful technique, in my opinion, involves the combining of three essentials; first, the ability to choose the proper place to set a trap; second, the ability to set and conceal the trap at that place so that the coyote will not detect it by sight or scent; and third, the use of the right kind and quantity

of bait or lure to attract the coyote to that particular place. The technique is not easily learned.

Having unburdened myself of those theories, I shall try to tell just a little about the coyote trapping work that I did incidental to my lion and bobcat hunting at Vermejo Park.

The first ones I caught consisted of a bitch and four pups which she had raised near Castle Rock. It was in November when I put out a couple of traps for them, and the pups by then were as big as their mother. There was a little juniper bush by the side of a trail through the horse pasture, and while wrangling saddle horses I noted that the coyotes passed this juniper bush frequently and used it as a scent station. I set one trap by the bush without using any bait, for they had baited the set naturally. The other trap I set by a rock a foot or so high, farther up the same trail, and used only a little piece of coyote dung placed next to the rock and a foot or so from the trap for a lure—just the things the dog family stops to smell. The traps were anchored by a short chain to a sixteen-inch steel pin, driven into the ground under the trap.

The first night I caught a two-thirds-grown pup in each trap. I reset the traps, each just outside the ring of disturbance made by the trapped coyotes, scraping together at a point just back of the trap all the droppings left by the trapped animals. The next night another pup bogged down in the trap at the juniper bush.

I reset the trap as before. It was several days before I had any more luck. Then I caught the other pup at the same juniper bush set. And again I reset the trap there. The mother of the pups came around near these sets, but was too wise to walk into them. Noting how near she would come, I made a blind set, that is, one in which no bait is used, back at the place she had come up to before.

In a couple of nights, with her attention all on the regular

set, she stepped into the other trap. That cleaned up that family. But they are not all that easy, by a long way. Sometimes they will locate traps, though well camouflaged beneath half an inch or more of dirt, and dig them up. Then at other times I have had them go out around my sets. Sometimes they are just lucky and come right up, but fail to step on the pan. Again the set may get wet from snow or rain and the trap freeze down, allowing the coyote to walk all over it without springing it.

There are a lot of things that can happen to the best of trappers, and no trapper that I have ever seen will get every coyote that comes by.

Right after the big snow in November I had a most unusual thing happen which netted me a coyote by pure accident or luck. When the snow came I had about twenty traps out. All were covered deeply by snow and there seemed to be no chance whatever of catching a coyote in them. So I did not look at them, except for a few in Van Brimmer Canyon, for more than a week.

When I finally went around the line to pull the traps up, I was astonished to see a big, old dog coyote in one of the traps up near Adams Lake. Right where the trap was set, the snow had drifted to a depth of eighteen inches. It didn't seem possible that a coyote could get caught; but there he was. It was easy to see from his condition that he had been caught only a short time. To substantiate that impression, I checked for tracks and found where he had come up to the trap only the night before. Anyway, if he had been caught before the snow, he could not have survived that long.

The way I figure it happened was that he smelled the bait I had used, even though it was buried beneath the snow, and had dug down to it and got caught when he reached the ground, which had not frozen beneath the deep snow. Not

often does one find a coyote so accommodating as to go to all that trouble to get caught.

Sometimes a coyote will cut his foot off in a trap and get away, to show up later as a "peg leg." I always hated to lose a coyote that way. I would much rather he would miss the trap altogether. The suffering is one thing, and often a "peg leg" turns to killing calves or sheep worse than ever, for he can catch them, whereas with only three feet he is unable to take more fleet-footed animals. Then, too, a "peg leg" is usually harder to get the second time than the first.

I lost three or four that way at Vermejo Park. One of them very soon made a second mistake. This coyote, a mature female, left a front foot in a trap up near Merrick Lake. Three days later she stuck the other front foot in a trap I had set about five miles east of where she had been caught the first time. The bait was the same at both sets, just the natural station scent, which indicates that animal instinct is pretty strong. Trappers who take advantage of that fact are likely to be the most successful. I am confident that if I had been using anything but the natural scent, she would not have been fooled the second time.

It was on this trap line along and near the road that a coyote stepped in one of my traps only a few seconds before we came in sight of the set. The line was being run in my car, and Mrs. Barker and our little girl were with me. When we came around a curve in sight of the set, which was only a few feet from the road, a big dog coyote was jumping as high in the air as the trap chain would let him and cutting up all sorts of capers. He was beside himself with rage and fright. He barked once or twice as we came alongside, a thing a coyote rarely ever does when in a trap. He would run on the chain and turn a somersault when he came to the end of it. Then he would grab a bush just within reach and chew and shake it

viciously, as if it were the cause of his misfortune. Then he would make two or three jumps just as high in the air as he could. The sign showed that he had only just been caught, and his actions were the same as those of a coyote I actually saw step into one of my traps 'way back in 1913.

My dogs were all good trap dogs except Kate. Even she would avoid getting caught, but the others were trained not to get caught and not to run coyotes unless they were trapped. Frequently we used drags instead of staking traps down solidly. Then sometimes the coyote would pull up the stake and get away with the trap. Often, with the drag or the trap stake the coyote would travel quite a distance and, without the dogs, would be hard to find.

Pup, Puse, and Queenie would pass up a hot-fresh coyote track, unless I urged them to take it. But they would, of their own accord, pick up a track made by a coyote dragging a trap, even if it were four or five days old. They would work such a track just as diligently as they would a lion track, for they could tell as well as I when a coyote had a trap on his foot, and knew then they could catch him for me.

We had several interesting chases that way, and during the entire winter I lost only one coyote that got away with a trap. This was one that pulled a stake just before a snowstorm, and the snow covered his track for so long that we could never find him.

The other mammals and birds that one inevitably catches by accident in coyote traps are a hindrance and a nuisance, and yet sometimes interesting. It is discouraging to find that a wise old coyote has been lured right up to the set where you expected to catch him, only to find that a rabbit, a rat, or a squirrel has already sprung the trap. But I know of no way that has ever been devised to avoid that entirely.

One day I found an interesting little animal in one of my

traps, and at first did not recognize it. It was a masked or black-footed ferret, a rare species that I did not know occurred in that area. Later I caught two more in that vicinity. Then I moved my traps because I did not want to destroy those rare little animals, and the traps inevitably either killed them or crippled them too badly for me to turn them loose.

I caught a deer occasionally, but they always jerked their foot out and went away unharmed. Cottontail rabbits were the worst offenders, and once in a while a wood rat or a tree squirrel would be taken. Badgers were frequently taken, although I much preferred that they stay away. A couple of gray foxes, a comparatively scarce species in this area, were taken. Skunks sometimes were caught, and to use the vernacular of Hollywood, would stink up the set pretty badly.

Crows and magpies, and once in a while a long-crested blue jay, would spoil a set.

Once a wild turkey was caught, and a big golden eagle found it and killed and ate it on the spot. I reset the trap and caught the eagle next. We often observed golden eagles attempting to catch turkeys, and they could do it, too, where they would find a flock out in an open space away from timber or brush.

Although I never observed an eagle catch a turkey, I did see the attempt made several times; and twice I found where turkeys had been killed by them. Golden eagles also killed some young calves and fawns when they could get at them. We therefore took golden eagles whenever we could.

Quite a number of bald eagles, symbol of our national emblem, wintered at the Park. They would congregate to feed on any dead animal, but we never caught them doing any damage of any kind, and hence we did not kill them. One big white-headed one was caught by accident in one of my coyote traps, where I had previously caught a coyote.

Late in winter while running my trap line down the creek four miles below the Club, I found where two coyotes had run a deer down off the mountain and had caught and killed it in the creek where it had taken a final stand to attempt to fight off its enemies. There was a fresh four-inch snow on the ground, making it easy to read from the tracks just what had happened.

It was a two-year-old doe, and in good condition. The coyotes had worried it up and down the creek for a while and then finally pulled it down and killed it right in the edge of the water. They had torn it open and eaten from the stomach and the hams, an enormous amount of meat. The tracks showed that they had run away from the carcass at our approach.

Gorged as they were on this warm venison, my thought was that they would not be able to get away from the dogs. I decided to give it a try anyway; so I urged Pup and Puse to go after them. The coyotes separated, and both dogs took after one of them. They pressed him pretty hard for a little while up on a rough, rocky hillside. He was forced to pull every trick that he knew, to escape. He doubled back, crossed his own track several times, and dodged around rocks and thickets; finally, the dogs became confused for a moment on his criss-crossed trail and lost just a little time.

Don Coyote was quick to take advantage of the moment's respite by stopping to disgorge the big meal he had eaten. I estimated the mess contained at least ten pounds of meat, nearly a third of his body weight. Relieved of that burden, which I had thought would be a fatal handicap, he easily outdistanced the dogs and they soon gave up the chase. Outsmarted by the use of an emetic!

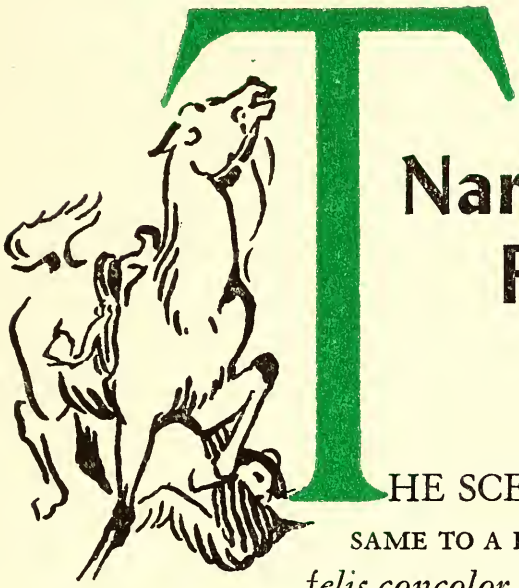
Maintaining a coyote trap line in winter in mountain areas is a difficult proposition at best. But when it is incidental to

other work which must be given preference, the difficulties are multiplied. Often on the very day that the trap line should have been run, I would have to give my attention to a reported lion track or, perhaps, to sign I had discovered myself. The trap line would be neglected for one or two, or even several days, and a neglected trap line is not efficient. Yet one can pick up a few coyotes, which helps out just that much.

During the five winter months, from November to March, inclusive, while I devoted most of my time to lion and bobcat hunting, I was able also to trap forty-six coyotes, or an average of nine each month.

It was work but it was fun, too; and the deer, turkey, and calves that were saved made it worth while.

Chapter 19



My Narrowest Escape From Death

THE SCENT OF HIS TRAIL IS THE SAME TO A PACK OF HUNTING DOGS WHETHER *felis concolor hippolestes* is called a mountain lion, cougar, puma, panther, or just plain old "long-tail." A lion hunt in the rough country of the Southwest with well-trained dogs is packed with thrills. Not only that, but it is one of the finest of sports as well as one of the most *dangerous*.

Yes, yes, I know mountain lions are generally conceded to be cowardly, but I have hunted them since I was fourteen years old and have killed more than a hundred of them. I have had several narrow escapes myself, and I know of several other hunters who have been killed or seriously injured while hunting mountain lions. I insist that lion hunting is a dangerous business.

I have had several narrow escapes from death as, for instance, the time I was pinned to a corral fence between the horns of a fighting-mad wild steer. Or the time a she-grizzly

took after me when I got between her and her cubs, or the time my saddle horse was shot from under me. But the very narrowest escape from death I ever had was on a lion hunt while at Vermejo Park.

One January afternoon as I was returning from a fruitless hunt, I observed some old lion sign. This was in a fork of York Canyon, only about five miles from headquarters. It was too late then to attempt to overtake the lion, which the tracks showed to be a large female; so I returned to headquarters and prepared for an early start next morning.

It was an hour before daylight, and the thermometer registered three degrees below zero when we started out to try to pick up the trail of the lioness. *We* consisted that morning of old Kate, my big, red trail hound; Pup, my old, fighting Airedale; Puse, the smartest and fastest trailing lion dog I ever owned; Buster, a big, stout, snorty saddle horse; and myself. The dogs knew as well as I what we were going to try to do, and we all hoped to add Mrs. Lion to the party before the day was over.

Crossing through a saddle in a high ridge west of York Canyon, we picked up the trail of the lioness sooner and fresher than I had expected. The winter sun was just gilding the snowcapped peaks with a golden glow when Pup made the strike. He tested out the track and indicated by his anxiety that it was fresh to his liking. He followed the track a few yards each way to get the direction it was headed, and then gave tongue. I had kept Kate and Puse back until Pup, who was always to be trusted, had indicated that he was sure it was a lion track and had definitely determined which way the lion had gone. Then I let them go and soon the hills echoed with the deep-voiced trail bellow of old Kate, accompanied by the shrill, staccato, irregular barking of Puse.

The pack trailed fast and sure and, though well mounted

on Buster, I could not keep up. Along the ridge for a mile, then down into a deep canyon they went, coming out in sight on the opposite slope, headed for rougher country. Now if you really want to see some rough country, follow a lion in his meandering some time. Soon the dogs topped out through a gap in the rim rock and disappeared over the ridge before Buster and I had reached the canyon bottom.

I urged Buster hurriedly up the steep, rocky, frozen slope. We lost some time getting through the rim rock, but finally made it when Buster, being led by the reins, jumped up onto a ledge of rock four feet high and barely wide enough to afford footing to work around to a break in the next higher stratum.

By the time we came out on top the dogs had gone down into the roughest sort of canyon and had headed up it. They were traveling fast and their voices indicated the track was hot. The country was terribly rough and the slopes steep and icy. But one forgets all that when on a fresh lion trail and follows on as fast as a stout mountain horse can make it, trying to keep in hearing of the dogs.

Down the slope we plunged, slipping, sliding, fighting brush, jumping logs, any way to get down to the canyon floor. We reached the bottom safely, unmindful of any danger, all out to keep the pack within hearing distance. The canyon was narrow and rocky. A dim trail, however, crossed back and forth through the wash which zigzagged along the canyon bottom. I headed Buster up the canyon the way the dogs had gone, trotting and galloping as terrain would permit.

Like a flash came a misstep on the ice in the trail, a stumble such as Buster had never made before, and he fell full on his right side with my right leg under him. The unexpected suddenness of the fall and the jar of it caused me to drop both bridle reins. Instantly I realized that my right foot was still in the stirrup and might not come free when he got up. For-

tunately the reins fell within reach. Quickly I took a couple of wraps round my right hand to be able to hold them at all costs. And that was the luckiest thing I ever did.

The greatest dread of all horsemen is the idea of hanging a foot in the stirrup and being dragged, kicked, and battered to death. Those who have witnessed it have seen a thing of horror to haunt their memory forever. Horseback riders should always look to their footwear and stirrups to see that there is a minimum of danger of a foot hanging in the stirrup when one is dismounting, or when a horse falls, or one is bucked off. And another thing, always keep a firm grip on the reins until you are free of the saddle.

I was wearing cowboy boots, which are designed to reduce to a minimum the danger of hanging in a stirrup. But these boots are not much at keeping one's feet warm in severely cold weather; hence "boot" overshoes are often worn. These overshoes are shaped, heel and all, like the cowboy boot, and fit quite snugly, yet they are more bulky and the rubber soles do not slip out of a stirrup as readily as a boot. I was wearing a pair of these "boot" overshoes.

Buster lunged to his feet so quickly that I could not kick my foot free of the stirrup, and the resulting cramped position of my foot in it, with me on the ground, held the overshoe there firmly. Buster, gentle enough under ordinary circumstances, snorted and kicked at me, missing only because I held the bridle reins tightly and kept his head pulled well around toward me. I kept jerking on the reins and talking to him to keep him under control as much as possible. He circled to the right, kicking at me and snorting and getting more excited every second. He dragged me around, but did me no harm, except to bruise and lacerate that part of my anatomy below the belt not covered by a pair of Western chaps.

All the time I held on grimly to the bridle reins, for I

realized that if Buster ever got his head free he would take out down the canyon dragging me, kicking me, and battering my brains out on the boulders along the way. I resolved to hold the reins to the last, and that was the strongest determination I ever made.

While all this was going on, seconds seemed like minutes, but I was doing everything I could think of to get loose. I did not feel scared or excited at the time, thanks to an unseen steadying Hand, but I did fully realize the terrible danger I was in and the nearness of a horrible death.

The first thing I thought of was my six-shooter to kill the horse. But, while I usually carried my Colt .45 on my belt instead of a rifle on the saddle, I had, for no special reason, brought the rifle, and I could not reach it. Next I tried to get my pocket knife to cut the stirrup leathers. To my dismay, my knife was in my right-hand pants' pocket and my chaps' belt was drawn tightly across my pocket and I could not get to my knife with my left hand, and I dared not release the bridle reins to use my right. I then tried to unlace the stirrup leathers, but could not.

Next, I tried to reach the saddle strings on the back of the saddle and pull myself up and get back into the saddle. I got hold of one but it broke. I could reach the short latigo and tried to unbuckle the saddle cinch, but I could not get enough slack. And still we went around and around in a rough circle. Buster was getting badly scared, moving faster all the time, kicking more viciously and missing me only because I kept jerking his mouth severely and keeping his head well around toward me.

I did not give up, but for a few seconds I had to admit that I could see no way out of my serious predicament. My foot stuck firmly inside boot and overshoe in the cramped position in the stirrup, and through it all had not loosened a bit.

I could not help wondering just where they would find me—and in how many pieces!

Then, when it seemed I could hold out no longer, there appeared clearly a means of escape that had been right before my eyes all the time. The overshoe had but one buckle, and there it was drawn tightly across my instep, but within reach of my left hand. Before Buster had made another full circle, I had unbuckled the overshoe and slipped my boot out of it, which released me instantly.

I got to my feet. I was free. I was unhurt except for a few bruises, and minus a little skin off my bottom. Buster quickly quieted and we were ready to go on again.

I put my overshoe on and started to get back into the saddle. Suddenly my knees were weak, there was an empty feeling in my stomach, and I began to tremble all over. For the first time I was scared. I sat down upon a log and looked back down the canyon with gratification at the unstained boulders against which a moment ago I had expected my brains would be battered out. I realized then that with the release of my boot from the stirrup I had been released from the tightest spot I was ever in, my narrowest escape from death.

For a few moments I sat there and lived those tense moments, or perhaps only seconds, over again and said a little prayer of thankfulness for my deliverance.

Suddenly I was brought back to the business in hand by the distant, deep-voiced, steady baying of old Kate, accompanied by the shrill, staccato barking of Puse, which told me as well as words that the lioness had treed. I went on to the tree and shot her without any fear of being attacked.

No, I did not say that mountain lions are dangerous. What I said was that lion hunting is!

Chapter 20

A Merry-Go-Round

IT IS VERY DOUBTFUL IF MANY PEOPLE HAVE EVER GOT THEMSELVES INTO AS many tight places through their own awkwardness, neglect, or carelessness, as I have. Certainly none has come unscathed out of as many predicaments which might have been serious. Sometime, perhaps, I shall write them out in chronological order, just for the fun of it.

A lot of them were ridiculously funny to spectators. Others would have been had there been any spectators. One temporarily serious, yet particularly ludicrous, situation happened when I least expected anything of the kind.

I was on a bobcat hunt at the head of Red River, at the northeast corner of the ranch. It was in February and the snow lay deep over most of the area. Trailing and treeing bobcats was quite easy, except when they would hit snow on the south exposures, which had melted and then crusted enough to hold them up. Then it was hard trailing, for a

bobcat leaves little scent on crusted snow, especially when the crust melts just enough for the surface to be wet.

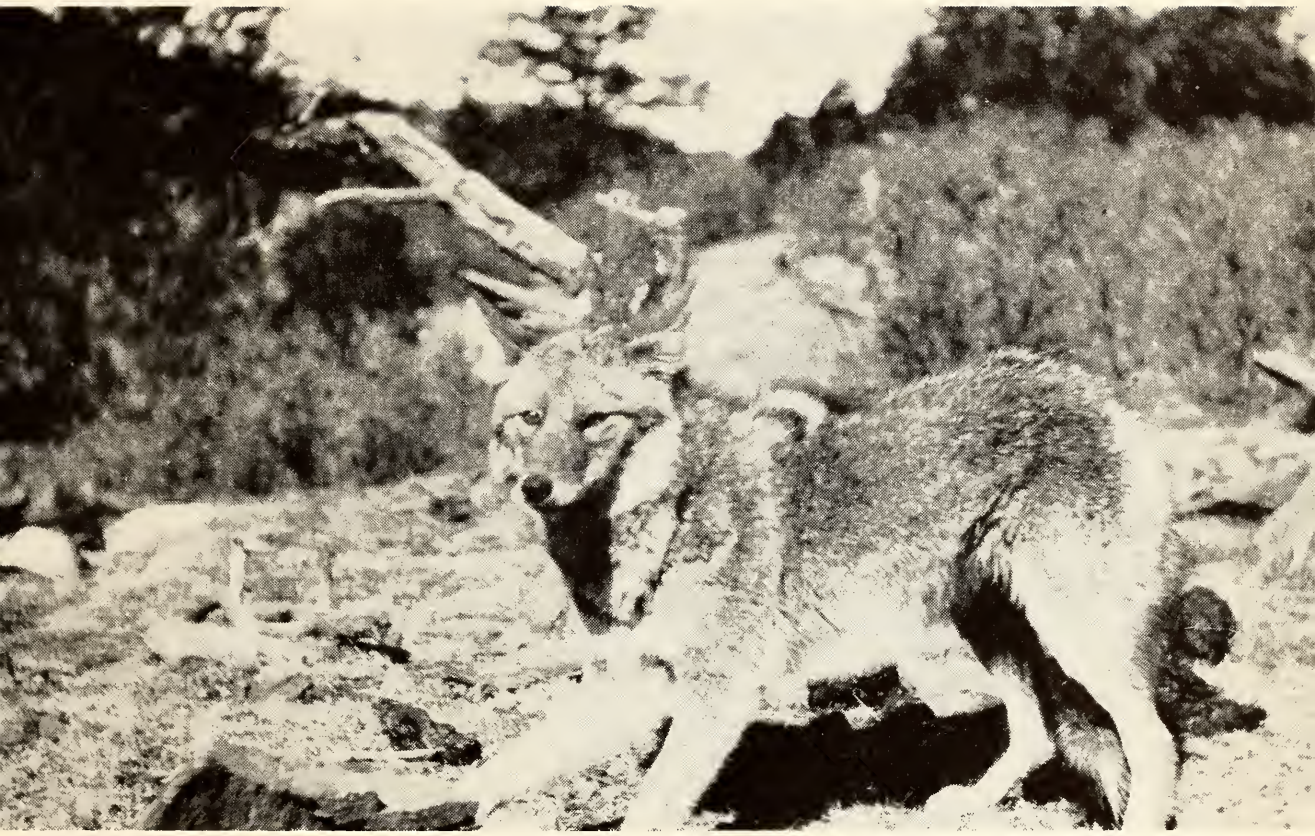
We had trailed a large female cat with three nearly-grown kittens, for some time with some difficulty in spots, but finally had jumped them and they were running in a bunch and breaking through the snow on the north slope, in aspen timber. I was sure they would soon take to trees.

My only fear of not getting them all was that one of the young ones would tree and the dogs go on after the others, and I would miss seeing the track where he had turned out to climb a tree. If that happened, it would be hard to come back and find a cat which might be hiding in any one of a hundred trees. With that in mind, I was watching carefully for a track in the snow turning to one side or another toward a suitable tree.

Sure enough, I was lucky and saw where one of the young bobcats had turned out to a tree fifteen feet away from the other tracks. I stopped and, as I dismounted, saw the gray, tassel-eared cat perched away out on a pine limb, thirty feet from the ground. I drew my forty-five and aimed carefully at its head and fired. Down he tumbled and lay perfectly still at my feet in the snow.

Anxious to get on after the dogs and the other three cats, I didn't take time to skin this one where he fell, as I usually did. Instead, I picked him up and threw him across the back of the saddle and tied him on. One set of saddle strings was tied around him just behind his front legs, and the other set around his flanks. This done, I hastily got on Dixie, and started on at as fast a gait as we could make it through the aspen and a foot of snow.

All went well for a quarter of a mile or so; then I noticed Dixie flinch and lay back her ears, for some unexplainable reason. I touched her with my spurs and she straightened



A trapped mountain coyote. It's fun to fool a wise old deer-killing rascal

Wild mountain turkeys on their winter range

out again for a few yards. Then again she flinched and definitely threatened to buck.

Dixie was entirely gentle, but if something went too badly wrong, I knew she could and would do a pretty good job of bucking. What was wrong, I could not imagine. She couldn't be afraid of the dead bobcat on the back of the saddle, for she was used to that sort of thing; so with spurs and reins I straightened her out again. But not for long.

This time she kicked up and then dropped her head and seriously started to buck. At first I held her head up so she couldn't do much. I was getting pretty much provoked at her and tried hard to get her out the fool notion of bucking; then I saw what was wrong.

The bobcat had come to life; the bullet had barely touched his skull and only stunned him. He seemed plenty peeved at his predicament. In his desperate efforts to get loose he was dragging the claws of his front feet up across Dixie's left flank, and kicking down with his hind feet, the claws of which were raking across her right flank.

So no wonder Dixie wanted to buck. And buck she did, bumping me into aspens first on one side and then the other, as we went round and round, and I couldn't stop her.

My first impulse was to let her throw me, for I had been thrown many a time by a bucking horse, without being hurt. But, heck, no, that wouldn't do! Turn a good saddle animal loose with a live bobcat tied on the back of the saddle, and there'd be no telling what would happen. She would probably run away, maybe run into a wire fence and cut herself to pieces, besides being badly clawed. If I ever got off I felt sure that I would have to walk home, some twenty miles, which I didn't fancy doing. Things were happening faster than I can tell abcut them, but I knew I must stay in the saddle at all costs.

I thought if I could get hold of the cat's neck I could choke it to death—maybe. But when I tried, he almost bit my hand. Up to now I had been able to keep a pretty tight rein; and, being handicapped by the deep snow, Dixie had not been able to do a first-class job of bucking, although she was shaking me up a-plenty. But things were getting worse by the second. My right leg hit an aspen sapling a pretty good jolt, and knocked me over to the left, halfway out of the saddle.

Seemingly that was just the opportunity the bobcat was waiting for. Instantly he sank his teeth into that certain part of my anatomy not covered by my leather chaps, and held on. But that was his undoing, for of course my left hand instantly went to relieve the place which was being bitten, and while his teeth were sunk into a softer place he couldn't bite my hand; so my fingers clutched his throat and froze there as tightly as I ever gripped anything in my life. He turned me loose but I held on to his throat with my left hand and pulled up on the bridle reins as hard as I could, with my right. We went round and round, and up and down, for what seemed like quite some time after that.

Finally, the cat went limp, his feet dangling harmlessly on either side of the horse, and as the clawing ceased so did the bucking. Both Dixie and I were pretty well winded, but no serious harm had been done to either of us. Neither the scratches in her flanks nor the teeth marks on my seat were very deep, although the scratches did look bad. My knees were bruised, but the chaps had protected them some while they had failed elsewhere.

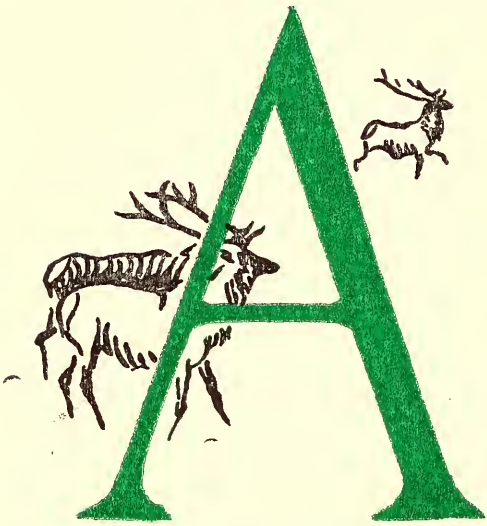
All the same, to be sure the cat was dead and not just choked down, I took him off the back of the saddle and skinned him before I went on.

Over the next ridge we found the dogs had all three remaining bobcats up trees, within a hundred yards of each other.

They were shot out of the trees and skinned, which I have found to be the safe way, after all.

And so we all had fun, and for the second time that winter I rode into camp with the skins of four bobcats tied onto the back of my saddle.

Chapter 21



Elk's Roundup

AFTER THE FIRST NOVEMBER SNOW, THE WINTER AT THE PARK WAS NOT SO BAD. OF COURSE, there were some more snows and the usual cold winter nights. Yet the sunny south exposures were bare most of the time so that game did not suffer.

Turkeys drifted down into the piñon and juniper areas where there was even more bare ground and some food. There were lots of turkeys there on the Park. The largest flocks were seen on the intermediate range during October and November. On the winter area they broke up into flocks of from half a dozen to twenty-five or thirty. A few continued to come into the fields at Castle Rock, but most of them were farther east.

At the Club headquarters we had a horse pasture of a hundred acres or so where we turned our extra saddle horses out during the daytime. They were stabled at night and fed hay and grain. Their droppings over the pasture naturally

contained quite a bit of whole grain that had passed undigested. There was a bunch of twenty-five or thirty turkeys that came every day to feed in the pasture on this grain. We were careful not to disturb them, and soon they would come right up around the barn to feed on waste grain.

Up at the Club house where Mr. Talle lived, there was another bunch that they fed at the back door. The turkeys would come right down to the house and finally got so tame they would eat out of Mr. Talle's hand.

Although the Park is almost at the extreme north boundary of the Merriam's turkeys' natural range, it is an ideal place for them. There they have the advantage of an intermediate range for spring and fall, and the lower areas for winter, where the storms are less severe. Then the high country, with its parks, aspen, and meadows, is ideal for nesting and rearing their young. We found that coyotes and bobcats molested them a great deal, while eagles and great horned owls took their toll also.

Mule deer in summer were more plentiful east of the Wall than back of it, or in the Costilla country. But in winter they congregated rather heavily in some of the favored open areas from a line east and south of the Club. The separate little units of white-tail in the Van Brimmer and in Red River areas seemed to stay pretty close to the same range, summer and winter.

Deer there on the Park had been subject to very heavy loss by lions. In the time I was there, over a hundred such kills were found. By killing sixteen lions that year, we can safely estimate that we saved about eight hundred head of deer a year. It is generally agreed that the average lion will kill a deer a week the year around. That certainly was so at the Park. The number of deer killed by hunters was negligible compared to what the annual increase should have been.

I had planned to make a definite management plan which would have included a program for permanently reducing very greatly the number of deer killed by predators and thus making it possible to increase proportionately the number of hunters. Those plans were interrupted in an unexpected manner.

The elk were the most spectacular and important game on the area, but not the most plentiful, for deer greatly outnumbered them. This elk herd has perhaps attracted more attention than any other in the state because it was the first introduced and established after the species had been exterminated over the entire state in the early 1890's.

Elk were hunted more than deer but, even so, the legal take was less than the annual increase. As has been mentioned, the Club members for the most part took bulls for the trophies. The cattle outfit took cows, mainly, for meat. The kill of neither bulls nor cows was excessive the year I was there.

The killing of elk any time of year by consent of the Club manager was entirely legal at that time under the old Class A Park Permit law. That law, on account of its susceptibility of abuse, and its actual abuse in some instances, was later amended.

While I was at Vermejo, it fell to my lot to kill most of the elk taken by the cattle outfit for meat, as well as to guide and assist sportsmen.

Many a sportsman has learned that his job has only just begun when he shoots his elk, particularly if it has to be packed out. Hunting and killing an elk is fine sport, but skinning and quartering it out in the woods and then bringing it in on pack animals, is real work. At least, that's the way I found it.

Killing the desired elk at a point where one could get to it with a pick-up truck helped a lot, for then the whole carcass

would be hauled down to headquarters and someone else had the job of skinning and quartering it there.

It is often said that a cowboy will walk a mile to get his horse to ride half a mile. Perhaps that may be exaggerated. But once I put in half a day's hard work maneuvering a band of elk to a position accessible by truck, to kill two of them so I wouldn't have to pack them in.

Mr. Talle sent me out one day along in the winter to kill two young cows. I hunted all one day and failed to find any elk at all. I knew, though, that there was a band of about a hundred ranging up along the east side of the Wall between Leandro and Bernal Creeks. It was one of the bands that had drifted back to the intermediate range after the big November snow had melted down considerably.

So the next day I went back there to try to find two suitable animals. The bunch was located away up on the mountain side, and from a distance I could see there were over a hundred head in the band. It would have been easy to slip in on them and kill two right there, but I didn't like the idea of having to dress and pack them down the hill. There was a passable road at the base of the mountain out in an open flat, and that is where I would have preferred to have the elk. So I decided to try to drive them down to the road at the risk of the herd's getting away entirely.

It was on this same mountain, only much lower down, that I had tried to tie up a live bear. I thought of that failure, but made up my mind to give this proposition a whirl anyway.

The elk were lying down, for it was after nine o'clock when I found them. I rode up above them, staying back in the timber out of sight. Then I went toward them ever so slowly, staying on my horse, for they were less afraid of a man on horseback than a man on foot. Finally I came in sight of two or three of the outlying animals. They sensed that

something was wrong and got up and slowly moved toward the main herd. I moved only just enough to let them hear me, and before long had the whole herd up and slowly moving off toward Bernal Creek, without their knowing just what had disturbed them.

Then I had to ride back up the hill out of hearing and work around to where I could come in ahead of, and a little above, them. I wanted to turn them down the hill and if possible back toward Leandro Creek. I got into the right position, got off and stood behind my horse, and waited. In a little while, the lead cow came in sight.

She saw the horse and stopped still and looked for a long time, while I stayed out of sight and kept my horse perfectly still. The herd bunched up behind her. Finally, she turned slowly and cautiously down the hill, the whole herd following for a little way. Then they all doubled back too soon. That would bring them back to Leandro Creek, but too high up for the road. I had to circle back above them again and come in ahead on the other side, to turn them farther downhill.

The reader may gain the impression that actions of the whole herd could be observed. Such was not the case. I had to judge what the herd was doing by just a glimpse now and then of one or two head. I just tried to give them the impression that something was wrong, first in this direction and then in another, so they would drift slowly away and not actually become frightened and run.

The same tactics I had used before, worked again, and the herd started off down the hill and were going all right, although not swinging toward Leandro Creek enough to suit me. I knew where there was a regularly used elk crossing which would put them in the right position, if they would head for it. They were feeding some and traveling slowly enough, but they weren't going in quite the right direction.

I had to go around to the other side of them again. This time I miscalculated their position and came out on them too suddenly; they were turned in the right direction, but I had started them out too fast to suit me. I had to get back around to a position to shoot when they reached the road for which they were now headed.

I wheeled my horse quickly and urged him up and then around the hillside as fast as he could go until I was directly above the spot where they should pass through an open flat. As I started down the hill toward the flat, which was a quarter of a mile below, I could see the leaders coming toward it also, and was sure that they would now make for the Leandro Creek crossing and head for Elk Creek. That would be fine if I could intercept them in the open flat.

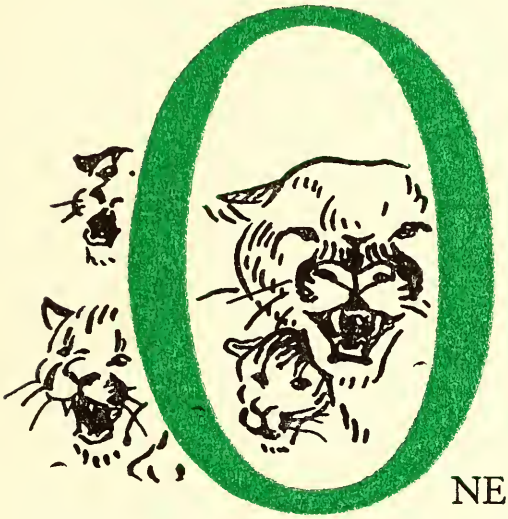
I loped my horse down a rough, rocky draw, as nearly out of sight as I could get, to within a hundred and fifty yards of the flat which they should cross. There I jumped off my horse and ran out on top of a little ridge and was thrilled to see them right where I wanted them. They were strung out in single file, or nearly so, trotting along behind their leader.

Quickly I picked out a sleek-looking blue-gray two-year-old heifer and aimed my rifle carefully for a heart shot. At the crack of the gun she left the line and turned to one side, ran fifty steps or so, and fell. When I shot, those in front of the one I hit went on, but the others stopped. That gave me the desired second or two to pick out another suitable cow. I chose one farther back in the herd and let her have it, but I shot too high. While she dropped out of the herd and soon stopped, she didn't go down; so I had to shoot her the second time.

There they lay within a hundred yards of each other and almost right on the road. It was nearly four o'clock and I barely had time before dark to hog-dress them and prop them up so they would cool out properly.

It had taken six hours of hard work, during every minute of which I had had to be tense and alert to see that no wrong move was made. I had worked hard to get out of some hard work. All the same, the elk were right on the road, so that Walt Smiley and I could go back after them the next morning with a pick-up instead of with a pack outfit.

Chapter 22



Four in a Day

ONE MORNING IN FEBRUARY, SKEET WILLIAMS TOLD ME THAT SOME OF THE BOYS HAD SEEN the tracks of four lions in a bunch leaving Gonzales Canyon and headed toward Chavez or York Canyon.

Chavez Canyon comes into the Vermejo from the north between the Club and York Canyon. It is a pretty rough piece of country but not very big. York Canyon is a long one, and it heads north of the high ridge back of the Club and drains to the southeast. It has many tributary side canyons and covers a big area. For the most part, it is not particularly rough. There are, however, some rough spots and rim rocks, so that it is pretty good lion country. One lion had been taken there previously, and one in Red River across the ridge from it, without incident worth recording.

Skeet said this was an old female with three kittens, maybe half-grown. The tracks were several days old when discovered. That didn't worry me any, because four lions in a bunch ought

to be easy to find anyway. I dropped everything to make a try for this family, on which I had not previously had any check whatsoever. They must have drifted in from the Colorado mountains.

By this time the snow was all gone from the south slopes and from most of the open ridge-tops and the lower valleys. It still lay on the timbered ridges in varying depths, and on the north exposures. The weather was fairly warm during the day, melting the snow some, but cold at night, causing the snow to crust enough to hold up a lion. Thus, tracks were not easily seen either on the crusted snow or frozen ground, and tracks made under those conditions leave very little scent after they are a day old.

I set out that same day, alone except for my dogs and horse, to try to find the lions. Near the head of Chavez Canyon, we found where they had come over the ridge, still headed eastward, but the tracks were at least four days old. We could not follow them but, taking the general course, cut back and forth for sign and picked it up in a place or two, but no fresher than before. We made some rather extensive circles but by sundown had not found anything worth while. Still, I was convinced they were there somewhere.

We returned to our headquarters a little disappointed but not discouraged. By daylight the next morning I had saddled a fresh horse and we were off again. The area where they should be was only three to ten miles from home; so we did not have a long ride to make and soon arrived in lion country.

That day we worked out Chavez Canyon in detail. They were not there; we were sure of it. However, we did find sign in one particularly rough side-draw where they had done a lot of tramping around while the wet ground was soft in the middle of the day. But the tracks were not fresh enough

to follow, and we never did find for sure which way they had gone out. Evidently they had waited until the ground was frozen hard and the snow crusted, before traveling. We circled around through the heads of some of the tributaries of York Canyon but could find no sign of them there. The delay for a day or two in that one spot showed that they were not just traveling through the country.

Again we had to return home without having found anything fresher than the original tracks we had seen when we first found them.

On the third day we worked the whole area with a series of ever-widening circles in a manner to surely cut sign if the lions were in the area. We picked up the tracks in two places, perhaps a day fresher than anything we had had before; so I still felt they were staying in the country. But where were they, and why didn't they move about enough to enable one to cut a fresh track?

Usually a female with young ones, even when she has a kill, will do quite a bit of traveling around while leaving the kittens at or near the kill. Often she takes them with her on small circles. But when the time comes for a new kill, she will go alone, making such excursions as necessary to find and kill a deer. There were some deer in all this area, so that she should have been able to make kills without too much difficulty.

The fourth day I set out determined to get a good track or prove that the lions had given me the slip and left the area entirely. I rode hard, checking every likely place in a very large area. By three o'clock I was at the far side of the area and had found nothing at all to indicate that the lions were still in the country. It appeared that they must have given me the slip somehow—I couldn't figure how; but I was beaten and gave it up.

With a tired horse, I started home. We cut straight through the area toward middle Chavez Canyon, expecting to go into and down it to Vermejo Creek. I was pretty low in spirits, and tired from the four hard days' rides. Pup, Puse, and Kate followed in single file at Dixie's heels. We had crossed a tributary of York Canyon and were plodding up a pine- and fir-covered slope toward the ridge of Chavez Canyon. There was some snow on this timbered north exposure. I stopped to let Dixie breathe a minute, and the dogs went on a few yards ahead.

When I started on again I noticed they had scented something off to the left and had started on a run, with their noses high, testing the wind. I followed right after them for a couple of hundred yards, and then they opened up with everything they had.

I rode out into a little opening, and there stood old Kate in a place where the whole area was trampled down by lions near the remains of a deer. Kate was bellowing as hard as she could, looking first one way and then the other, as if to say, "How the hell am I to tell which way they went with all those tracks?"

Not so with Pup and Puse. They had gone on and in an instant were frantically barking "treed" not a hundred yards beyond. We had run right in on the lions feasting on a deer and had jumped the whole outfit right there! Kate got her bearings and took out up the hill, away to the right of the place where the other dogs were.

I rode toward the place where Puse and Pup were barking "treed." When I came in sight, some fifty steps from the tree, Puse gave me instructions what to do and told me what he was going to do as plainly as if he had put it down in writing.

The lion, a five- or six-months-old yellow, white-bellied cub,

was in a pine tree standing on a limb some twenty feet up. Puse looked at me, jumped up the tree as far as he could a couple of times, then ran to me and jumped up against my leg, barking and whining, then ran back to the tree, jumped up it as high as he could, and then took off up the hill as fast as he could go; and Pup went with him. He had shown me the lion in the tree and told me to go get it, for, by cracky, *he* was going on to get another one! He did it, too.

By the time I had shot this one out, Puse had barked "treed" off up the hill, and Pup instantly joined in. I went up there to kill that one; but by the time I got there, Kate was barking "treed" around to the right a hundred yards or so. When Kate said she had one, Pup went to her as if doubting her ability to handle it alone. Then, before I could shoot this one out, Puse left again as fast as he could go, right up the hill. I shot the second one, then rode over and shot the third cub, which Kate had treed. Then I listened for Puse but did not hear him.

I suggested to Kate and Pup that they had better go help Puse as he must be after the old female, for I had killed three cubs. They went off in that direction, and soon Kate gave tongue on a track and went bellowing off over the ridge and down into Chavez Canyon. I rode on down there, expecting to find the old female up a tree; but she wasn't there. Pup and Kate had treed still another cub, and Puse was nowhere around. It was clear then: there were four cubs instead of three, and Puse had gone on after the old one.

That morning I had shot five or six times at a coyote and had saved back only four cartridges for my rifle, which I happened to be carrying instead of my forty-five. If I used my last cartridge on this cub, I would have none left for the old one. I decided that I had better keep that cartridge for the old one and do something else with this cub.

So I got a good club about three feet long and climbed the tree. It was a big juniper, with a top kind of spread out. I clumb up even with the cub, which was hissing at me but, of course, showing no other signs of fight or fear. Holding on with my left hand, I wielded the club with my right, and with three or four blows knocked the cub out completely, and he fell to the ground dead.

It was now almost sundown, and I could not hear Puse, but was sure that he had the female up a tree somewhere. I tried to get Pup and Kate to go on and hunt him up, but they had their minds made up that there were no more lions. Had Skeet not said there were only four?

We climbed out of the canyon and went back to where I had seen Puse last, but still Kate and Pup said, "Heck, there ain't no such thing as five lions in a day." All the same I knew there was another one up a tree that very minute. But where? I rode this way and that, listening from every vantage point, but not a sound could I hear. It got dark. But still I rode poor Dixie, tired as she was, in a big circle, but never could find Puse or get Kate and Pup to take his track.

By nine o'clock I gave it up and rode on in to headquarters. It was eleven o'clock by the time I got in, but I went up to Mr. Talle's house and told him about my luck and asked if he or any of them there had heard Puse barking late that evening.

"Why yes," he said. "There was a dog barking until just a little while ago about half a mile back of the house, up toward the rim."

I said, "Why in thunder didn't you go up and get you a lion?"

He said, "Lion? I just thought he had a squirrel up a tree."

I went out and listened, but Puse was no longer there. He had left the treed lion after keeping her up for four or five hours. Had one of the other dogs been with him, he would

Battle scarred and gray with age, Pup and Puse take it easy

The author with the family of five lions that were so hard to find

have stayed all night. He got in about midnight, having evidently gone back up over the rim and trailed my horse on in.

That was the third time I had killed four lions in a day and I had always wanted to make it five. By failing to find Puse after he had treed the fifth one, I had missed an opportunity which likely will never be presented again.

The next morning I took a pack horse to bring in the four cubs that we had killed the day before—and the old female lion, which we were sure to get also sometime during the day. We went right back to where we had jumped the lions the day before, because it seemed certain that the mother would come back to hunt for her ill-fated offspring.

By the time I had got the pack horse tied up, the dogs had struck the old lion's track. She had been there at the kill and to at least one of the dead cubs; then she had gone down toward the canyon the way we had come into the area the day before. Of course, the track was fresh and the dogs took it right off, and I could not keep up with them. They crossed the canyon and soon went out of hearing over the ridge.

I was glad the lion had taken that route, for I had feared she would head back over the high rim rocks as she had done the day before, escaping after having been treed for several hours. That was a difficult, rough country and I was happy not to have to go into it after her.

At the top of the next ridge, I could hear the dogs barking "treed" beyond another little ridge that lay half a mile ahead. I rode across to that ridge and came out in a little opening on top of it. From there I could hear the dogs plainly and in a moment located them. There, about two hundred yards away, across the draw, I could see the lion in a low, sprangling, dead piñon tree, which stood right on the edge of a twenty-foot cliff. She was not over four feet off the ground, crouched in the crotch of the tree; her tail was toward the cliff as she

faced the baying dogs, who could approach only from the upper side.

When I came in sight I whistled shrilly to the dogs, as was my custom, to let them know I was coming and to give them a little encouragement (which was actually not needed) to stay with their quarry. Whenever I whistled or hollered to them when they had an animal treed or at bay, it stimulated them to greater eagerness and effort to get at their quarry. And so it did, much to my regret, this time.

At the distance I was from the treed lion, and due to the fact that its tree was right at the edge of the cliff, I did not realize how near to the ground the lion was and how close the dogs were to her. As a matter of fact, they were barking right in her face. So close were they that had they been able to get to her from behind as well as in front, they would have pulled her out of there.

When they heard me whistle, they took it as a signal to go on in and get her, dangerous though it was. I saw Pup lunge at her and it looked as if he caught her by the neck, and then was forced to turn loose; but before he got away, the lion grabbed his head with the claws of one front foot and pulled him back up to her. Then Puse leaped at her and she reared back and let Pup go; but she had pulled him over so far that when he fell from the tree, he went right over the cliff and landed in a pile of rocks twenty feet below.

I was surely afraid he had been killed or badly crippled. But in an instant he got up and started back around the cliff. About that time Puse had decided he would go in and pull her out, and jumped right up in the crotch of the little dead tree with her, and got exactly the same treatment she had given Pup, and over the cliff he went. Puse was up instantly, though, and struck out around the end of the cliff where he could get back up it; and he and Pup got back to the tree at

the same time, though they weren't quite so cocky as they had been.

Meanwhile, Kate had been baying at the lion, right up close, but did not attempt actually to catch her. I don't know whether she had more sense or less guts than Pup and Puse; but whichever it was saved her a bloody, painful experience. I was afraid Pup and Puse would try it again if they saw me coming. To keep that from happening, I rode away around and came in from the other side. I left my horse back out of sight and crept up quietly to within thirty steps, to shoot the lion, as I had only my six-shooter and had to be fairly close.

I stood behind a tree and peeked around it to watch the dogs and the lion for a moment before administering the lethal dose of lead. Kate stood right there baying loudly and steadily, not three feet from the lion's claws. The crotch of the tree was not over four feet high. Pup and Puse were bleeding very badly, or so it appeared from the bloody snow around the tree. They would rush right up to the tree and put their feet upon it and snap and bark right in the lion's face. Then, first one and the other would leave the tree for a few seconds to rub his bloody head and shoulders in the snow.

That female lion was about the maddest animal I ever saw. She was snarling and growling, her nose all wrinkled up and her ears laid back, and striking at the dogs with first one paw and then the other.

Crouched there precariously in that little dead piñon tree, claws extended, snarling and hissing, with slobbers dripping from her mouth and her long tail nervously swinging from side to side, she was a picture of defiant rage such as one seldom sees. She had a right to be mad. She had lost her four babies and for the second time in twenty hours she had been forced ignobly to take refuge in a tree to escape her enemies.

I watched, fascinated at the tableau before me, for longer

than I should have, for she again got her claws into Pup's already bloody head; but this time he pulled away. Then I shot her in the breast so that the bullet would range back through the heart, and she fell backward, going over the cliff, end over end, just as my dogs had; but unlike them, she failed to return.

I at once examined the dogs to see how badly hurt they were. Pup was severely cut about the head, one ear was badly torn, and a claw had gone into the corner of one eye and cut a deep gash nearly two inches long. He had to be sewed up in several places. The cut at the corner of his eye left a bad scar and left the corner of the eyeball exposed too much, so that the eye was always bloodshot.

But he soon recovered and lived to be twenty-one years old, a very ripe old age for a dog. He was thirteen years old when this happened, and four years later got into a fight with a wounded lion, and was cut up so badly that he had to be carried in five miles on a saddle horse and taken twenty-five miles to a veterinarian for stitches and treatments.

Puse was not quite so severely cut, and a few stitches fixed him up. In a week they were both "raring" to go again.

When we got back to where we had jumped the lions the day before and for the first time had opportunity to look things over, I found the reason why we had been unable to find these lions. The kill where we jumped them was a nice eight-point buck, just about all eaten up. Then around the hill, less than a hundred yards away, was a ten-point buck that had been killed a little longer than the other, and was also nearly all eaten. Near by were the remains of a porcupine that had been killed and eaten.

They had had so much meat there in those thickets that they had not left a forty-acre tract for a week; but around the kills, the whole area was tramped and wallowed down where

the kittens had been playing. I had ridden twice during the previous four days within half a mile of their hideout.

Although I had not killed my five lions in one day, I did have the satisfaction of packing five lions in on one horse, which was the first time I had ever done that, and a fitting end to my lion hunting at Vermejo Park.

Chapter 23

A New Job

A PART OF MY JOB AT VERMEJO PARK WAS TO MAKE A MANAGEMENT PLAN for handling the wildlife and predator situation there. Two propositions were to be given consideration for such management plans. One was to be on the basis that livestock would have preference on the range and its welfare given priority over wildlife. Game would be incidental to the major operation, or at least secondary to it.

The other was to be on the basis of giving game primary consideration and priority on the range, and only permitting the grazing of such numbers of livestock as could be taken care of without undue competition in the use of the forage of all types. The control of predators would, of course, have its place in either plan.

I was fully aware of the fact that to make these plans, it would first be necessary to become thoroughly familiar with the whole area; with the wildlife species on it and their habits

in its use; with the natural limiting factors, including predation; and with the livestock operation. At the very outset it became evident that this could be accomplished while at the same time removing what was obviously a serious limiting factor to game, that is, ridding the area of surplus predators, especially lions.

One cannot find out what goes on in a mountainous game range by staying on roads and trails. If one really wants to learn a new mountain country in detail, he should spend some time following a pack of dogs on the trail of bears, lions, and bobcats. They will show it to you. They will show you country which you would otherwise never see. They will take you to the scenes where the dramas of the forest are enacted day by day. They will reveal to you the records of many a tragedy in the life-struggle of the denizens of the mountains.

Thus, in doing the predator control work, guiding hunters, and working right with the cattle outfit, I had an unprecedented opportunity to study the inter-relationships of predators, livestock, and wildlife and, indeed, of the different species of wildlife to each other.

I appreciated then, as I do now, the fact that the relations of predators to wildlife and the effects of predation upon the various species of game is a highly controversial subject. We must, of course, admit that the full relationships of predator to prey are not fully understood, and that even trained wildlife biologists are often in disagreement on this important subject.

But that is not a valid reason why one should sit down and wait until full agreement is reached before taking action to put a stop to the destruction of a game supply by predators. Nor is there any reason why a man of average intelligence, who has spent his lifetime in contact with wildlife and predators, and who has ridden a horse through mountain game ranges

for scores of thousands of miles, should set aside the observations he has made and conclusions he has reached, pending their endorsement by college-trained biologists, many of whom lack practical experience.

So it was that I set out to do one job and, while doing it, to collect the data necessary to do the other. Unfortunately, neither was completed, because of an unexpected change to another, more important job. Yet I may say in passing, that I know of nothing I would like better than to spend the rest of my life making and executing a wildlife management program for Vermejo Park, with wildlife given priority over the livestock in the use of the range.

No area that I know of in the Southwest has such splendid possibilities for public ownership, and management on that basis. My fondest hopes are that at some time, in some way, the State Game Department will own and operate the Vermejo Park as a model game-management area. It could be made to attract very wide attention. Indeed, it could be made a game-management demonstration unit of national as well as state importance and interest.

How it is to be acquired, I don't know, but possibly funds may become available sometime; or perhaps, it may come about as an endowment through the magnanimity of the heirs of Harry Chandler, who passed away since the preceding chapters were written. No monument that could be erected as a tribute and memorial to a great financier would compare with such a gift to the state for the perpetual benefit of the public. Such a memorial would be unique. It would be big and of outstanding characteristics, even as the late Harry Chandler was a big, outstanding man.

Late in January, 1931, I received a letter from a friend in the state legislature, which was in session at the time, stating that a bill long sought by sportsmen and conservationists stood

a good chance of passing. This bill provided for delegating to the State Game Commission full regulatory powers in the management of wildlife resources of the state. It further provided for retention by the State Game Commission of authority to appoint the State Game Warden, first given it by a 1925 statute.

My friend advised me that if this bill passed, in all probability a new State Game Warden would be appointed. He suggested that, if I were interested in the position, I should submit an application at an early date. Within a period of a few days, I received letters from several other friends, making the same suggestion. My reply to all was that if there was to be a change of wardens anyway, I would like to submit an application for the position; but I made it clear that I did not want to take any action that could be construed in any way as seeking the removal of the incumbent.

A little later I came to Santa Fe and conferred with several persons and was given assurance that the bill would pass and that it was reasonably certain that there would be a new State Game Warden selected. Acting upon that information, I submitted to the Governor an application for the position, to be transmitted to the new Commission if, or when, one were appointed. My application was submitted upon the condition that it was to be considered only in the event a vacancy should occur in that office.

Back in 1926, the State Game Commission had offered to me, and begged me to accept, a position in the Department as executive assistant to the Warden, with the promise that at the end of that year the appointment as State Game Warden would be secured for me. I was forced to decline the very kind offer with deepest regrets, first, because I was not sure that the incoming governor would accede to the Commission's request to carry out the plan and, second, because I could not

afford to give up the operation of my farm and cattle ranch at that time without being certain of a more or less permanent appointment.

In 1931 I was in an entirely different position. I had rented my ranch and sold my cattle at the beginning of the Great Depression, to take the job at the Park.

In due time the bill passed the legislature and was enacted into law as Chapter 117 of the 1931 Session Laws. Not long thereafter, one new appointment was made to the Commission, and I was summoned to Santa Fe for a conference and to present evidence of my qualifications for the position of State Game Warden. Later, two more new members were appointed to the Commission, to take the places of two who had been requested by the Governor to resign.

Again I was called to Santa Fe, and on April 1, 1931, was appointed State Game Warden by the Game Commission. I have held that office just fifteen years as these lines are being made ready for publication.

Naturally, I wanted to be in this new work. I felt there was a great opportunity to use my humble talents along this line and, with my long experience with wildlife, to serve the state in a useful manner. Had I fully realized then the heavy responsibility the position entailed, and the great, ever-increasing volume of work that always lies ahead, I might have preferred to stay with my dogs and my horses.

It was with deepest regret that I left Vermejo Park when I did, before the job I had set out to do was completed. There would have been a great deal of satisfaction in spending one or more additional years there, to really round out a good wildlife program, although it is doubtful that it would ever have been put into effect.

But one must seize opportunities as they arise, and the opportunity which presented itself then might never have come

again, for that was the second time it had knocked at my door. Besides, I love the work.

The man whose vocation happens to coincide with his avocation is indeed fortunate. Since that is one hundred per cent true in my case, I am not only fortunate but especially happy in my work.

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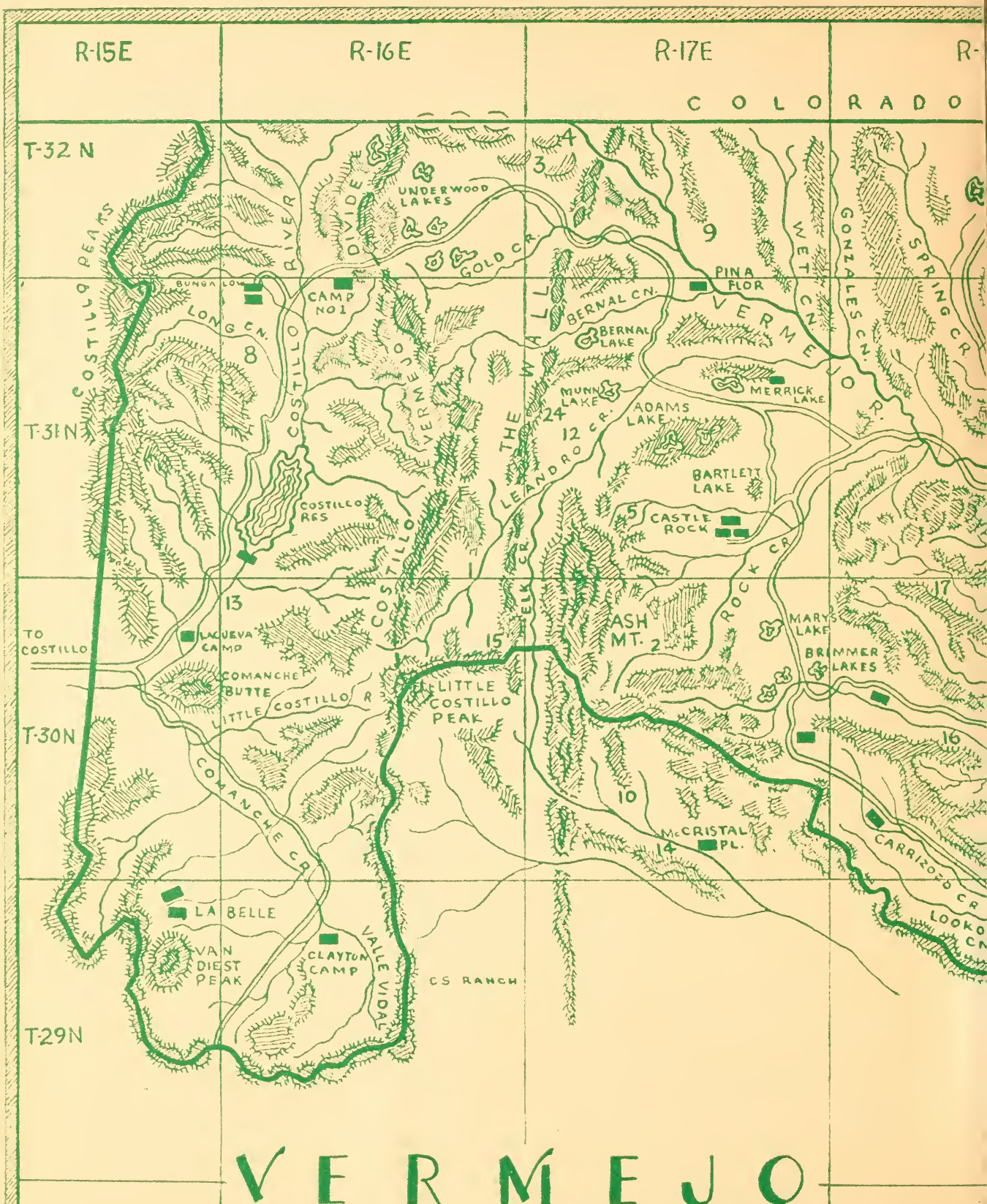

VERMEJO PARK

SCALE – 1/4 INCH = 1 MILE

LEGEND

CANYONS – CREEKS

ROADS

COW CAMPS, HDQS.

LAKES

RIDGES – PEAKS

PREPARED BY THE AUTHOR – 1946

WHERE THINGS HAPPENED

1	FUR LINED LION KILLED	31-16
2	TURKEY NEST FOUND	30-17
3	ADVENTURE WITH BABY ELK	32-17
4	22 PAIRS ELK ANTLERS	32-17
5	WHERE CRIPPLE FOOT WAS KILLED	31-17
6	PUP PULLED BOBCAT OUT OF HOLE	30-18
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16	4 HUNTERS TOOK 4 DEER	30-18
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